THE AGONY OF VIETNAM

SUSHEELA KAUSHIK

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THE AGONY OF VIETNAM

Susheela Kaushik

The present book was originally written as a thesis towards Ph. D. degree. It is an objective and scholarly study of the American attitude and policies towards the most burning and prolonged of the post war issues namely the Vietnam War. Dr. Kaushik in this study, has analysed the various factors and probed into the underlying motives of the U.S. policy makers towards this question in the initial period i.e. 1945-54. She has conclusively proved that it was the exigencies of the cold war and power politics in Europe which made the U.S. overcome its opposition to colonialism thereby leading to a deeper and deeper involvement in the affairs of Vietnam. In 1954, the United States emerged as the foremost guarantor of South Vietnam thus paving the way for a direct military intervention. As such the present book forms a fitting and necessary introduction to any study of the present American policy in Vietnam.

THE AGONY OF VIETNAM

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The Origin and Background of American Intervention in Vietnam

SUSHEELA KAUSHIK

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Dedicated to the memory of
My Father
whose cherished dream this book fulfils

PREFACE

This study was started in 1961, long before the Vietnam situation developed to the present complicated stage, as a modest project for a Ph. D. dissertation. However, the current confusion in Vietnam has added additional importance to the main theme of my study. It has helped to keep the interest alive in events that are now two decades old and should properly have become part of diplomatic history.

The crisis in Vietnam has been one of the longest and as yet unresolved issues of the post war period. Begun essentially as a struggle for independence from the French control in 1945, it has today taken the form of an ideological warfare in which the military potentials of the US, one of the most powerful nations of the world, are faced with the manpower and guerilla tactics of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese.

History would record that no other war with a foreign enemy has so widely divided the United States within and isolated her without. The Vietnam crisis also stands out as the most protracted involvement that the United States ever had outside the Western hemisphere. This naturally makes one ponder as to how and why the United States got into this quagmire. A study of the origins of the present American war there can logically be traced to the United States policy towards Vietnam during the period 1945-1954.

The post-war history of Vietnam, for the sake of convenience and clarity, could be broadly divided into two periods. During the first phase which extended from August 1945 to July 1954, it was a war waged mainly to wrest independence from the French colonial control. This phase came to an end with the Geneva Conference of April-July 1954 when the country was partitioned into two small independent zones along the 17th parallel, with the promise of an early reunification. The second period beginning from July 1954, witnessed a war between the two Vietnams—North and South. This is sometimes referred to as the second Vietnam crisis. This crisis was more of an ideological-cum-power struggle in which the two regimes were supported by the two big power blocs.

It is my view that the American policy towards these two crises forms one continuous thread—starting from a gradual awakening of the existence of the crisis to an apparently unending involvement in the same. The first phase could properly be called the formative period of the American involvement in the Vietnam question. It witnessed a very gradual shaping of American policy towards this issue as it came to assume wider and wider political and military dimensions. The extent of American military involvement in Vietnam today and the loss in terms of men and material has far surpassed those in any previous wars including the Second World War and the Korean War.

This study is an attempt to trace the origin and growth of this gradual involvement of the United States and is confined to the first phase. Many works have been attempted on the American policy towards Vietnam after 1858; some even deal with the years 1953 onwards. However, I do not think there is any work which has traced the American policy and role from the beginning of the crisis. This book is an attempt to fill this gap and thus contribute towards a better understanding of the American predicament there.

I am fully conscious of the challenges in venturing to undertake this complex subject. I am also aware of the fact that vital primary information concerning such a contemporary subject would not be available to scholars for a few decades. I was also faced with the task of coping up with the enormous amount of secondary material which the crisis, in view of its current importance, has brought forth. But incidentally these very reasons have made the subject more interesting and I have, to the best of my ability, tried to present a complete and objective analysis of the American policy.

The present volume consists of eight chapters. The first two chapters deal with a brief historical background of the Vietnamese question and of the American involvement there respectively. The third and fourth chapters deal with the policy and attitude of the Democratic Administration of President Harry S. Truman to the issue, before and after the outbreak of the Korean War respectively. The fourth chapter studies the increased importance which the Vietnamese crisis assumed following the outbreak of the Korean crisis and the steps which the United States undertook to save Vietnam for the West.

The fifth chapter seeks to study the policy of the Eisenhower Administration and how far it marked a change from the policy of the Democratic Administration. It studies the deeper and deeper involvement of the United States, leading to a widespread debate as to whether it might result in a direct American intervention in the crisis.

The next chapter deals with this very controversy and the views of those closely associated with the policy formulation both in the Administration and the military. It also analyses the various factors, domestic and foreign that prevented such a direct intervention by the United States.

The seventh chapter deals with the Geneva Conference, and the attitude of the U.S.A. to the Conference; to the various proposals before it and finally to the Geneva Accord itself. It evaluates the Geneva Decisions from the point of view of American aims and objectives in Vietnam. The main focus here is on the American attitudes and policies, and the positions taken by other participants have been dealt with only to the extent they were relevant to the American policies.

In the conclusion, I have sought to analyse as to how far the aims and assumptions came to be fulfilled and the factors that were responsible for their failure.

I am thankful to the United States Educational Foundation in India for the Fulbright-Smith-Mundt Fellowship which enabled me to spend nearly ten months in the United States. This made it possible for me to consult private papers and memoirs and collect data which were not available in India. It was also possible to meet some of the personalities associated with Vietnam.

I am thankful to Professor M.S. Rajan, the then Director of the Indian School of International Studies, New Delhi, for facilitating this dissertation. I am deeply obliged to Dr. M.S. Venkataramani, Professor and Head of the Department of American Studies, for supervising this project.

I am also deeply indebted to Mr. Girija Kumar, Librarian and the members of the staff of the Library of Indian School of International Studies—Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi. My thanks are also due to the members of staff of the various libraries in the United States whose co-operation made the task easy.

Some of these libraries included, the libraries of the Columbia University in New York, New York Public Library, Princeton University Library, Yale University Library, and the Library of Congress, Washington.

My thanks are also due to the Indian Council of Social Science Research, whose financial help facilitated the publication of this book. However, I am exclusively responsible for the opinions expressed and the conclusions reached.

I am thankful to my husband for his constant inspiration and consistent co-operation which encouraged me to complete this dissertation against many odds. Finally, my thanks are due to my son who has been looking forward to the completion of this project with immense patience.

New Delhi *Susheela Kaushik*

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I

Background

The Second World War had a profound impact on the western colonial system in South and South East Asia. The situation that the western colonial nations confronted was sharply different from what it had been in 1939. They were exhausted by their war-time travails and they had to reckon with the effect that their own proclamations of liberty and right of self-determination had evoked. The spirit of nationalism among the hitherto "subject" peoples of Asia could no longer be held back by promises or threats. The moves that paved the way for Britain's withdrawal from its great imperial bastion in the Indian sub-continent marked the beginning of the end of the old imperialist order.

However, in the two colonies Indonesia and Indo-China a struggle against their colonial masters ensued. The war in Indo-China against French rule which went on for almost another decade, came to interest many other nations of the world, thereby widening its scope and international repercussions. The four states, now

called North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and known collectively as Indo-China, form the eastern part of the south-eastern extremity of Asia. Of these four, the North and South Vietnams constitute more than half of the Indo-Chinese area. They also account for a major proportion of the Indo-Chinese population.

The Vietnamese have had a long history. Though much of their earlier history is not very clear, one can trace the existence of the Vietnamese kingdom to as early as 500 B.C. In 200 B.C. this kingdom was conquered by the Chinese generals from the north and it became a Chinese colony in 111 B.C. For more than a thousand years it remained a Chinese colony. It was by 940 A.D. that the Vietnamese secured full control of their country, though China continued to be formally the suzerain. In the coming centuries, the Vietnamese extended their control over the South where lay the kingdom of Champa and the Mekong Delta. By the end of the eighteenth century, Vietnam had expanded to the full extent of its present day boundaries of North and South Vietnam.

The Vietnamese came into contact with the French missionaries and traders for the first time during the seventeenth century. In 1845, the French obtained commercial concessions from the Chinese Emperor. This was followed by frequent clashes of the French naval squadrons with the Vietnamese in defence of their trade and missionaries, resulting finally in the establishment of a French protectorate over Vietnam on 6 June 1884. A year later the Chinese who had been the traditional overlords of this region recognized French suzerainty over Vietnam by concluding a treaty with the French to that effect. Here started the French colonial rule over Indo-China which came finally to an end with the Geneva conference of 1954, except for a brief period of six months between March and September 1945, when the control over Vietnam temporarily passed on into the hands of the Japanese and then on to the occupying forces of Britain and China.

The fall of France in June 1940 to the invading German armies, encouraged the Japanese to move in the direction of seizing control over Indo-China. The Japanese warlords had for long cast their envious eyes on the natural resources of Indo-China. Occupation of Indo-China could be the key to the Japanese conquest of South-East Asia. Cut off from France, the French representatives were clearly aware of their helpless condition in an alien territory. Within forty-eight hours of the French surrender, the Japanese acquired

from the authorities in Saigon permission to station a Japanese military mission in Tongking. This was followed by further concessions to the Japanese in the next twelve months. In July 1941 the Japanese were allowed to station their troops in Indo-China and granted the use of all airports as well as naval bases.

The Japanese were not slow in extending their control over the economic life of the country. Gradually the Japanese made more and more inroads into Indo-China, though the French continued to rule the country. It was only in the spring of 1945, five months before the V-J Day, that the Japanese actually occupied Indo-China. On 9 March, the Japanese brought to an end the continuance of the French sovereignty over Vietnam, thereby marking the end of an era in Vietnamese history. In the next five months of Japanese occupation, the Vietnamese had their first taste of Japanese-sponsored "self-government".

Following the Japanese coup the Vietnamese Emperor, Bao Dai, who had been installed on the throne in 1925 by the French, agreed to collaborate with the Japanese. In return the Japanese Government agreed to recognize and support the independence of Vietnam. Bao Dai repudiated the protectorate treaty of 1885 with France and appointed a cabinet with Tran Trong Kim as the Prime Minister, on 17 April. The Japanese occupation also reversed the French policy by unifying the three kys (provinces) of Annam, Tongking and Cochin-China into one Vietnam—a long time demand of the nationalists.

In spite of these innovations, the Vietnamese were really not free. The Japanese-granted independence, with the Japanese "advisers" taking the place of the French governor, had not satisfied the Vietnamese who revived the cry of Doc Lap (independence). After a brief interval, the nationalist movement reappeared with increased intensity. The Government instituted by the Japanese was not effective or popular enough to rally all the nationalist elements in Vietnam. When the Japanese left, it was not the Kim Government to which the people looked forward to defend their independence. The Kim Government came to be called a puppet regime of the Japanese and it fell in August, a week before the Japanese surrendered. The leader to whom many Vietnamese looked up as their authentic spokesman was Ho Chi Minh.

The Growth of the Nationalist Movement

The Vietnamese as a people had resisted foreign rule even from

the very beginning of the Chinese conquest. The thousand years of Chinese rule had been marked by brief but frequent rebellions. Although these attempts ended abortively, the Chinese overlords never quite succeeded in controlling the colony. The French who replaced them, in their turn, faced the Vietnamese resistance from the time they established their protectorate over Indo-China. The young Emperor Ham Nghi who had ascended the throne in 1884, led a guerilla warfare against the French supported by the mandarins and scholars. This was, however, put down by the French even in its early stages, when they captured the Emperor in 1888. In spite of this, guerilla fighting kept breaking out intermittently, more especially in the upper reaches of Tongking. However the resistance at this time was more in the nature of an attempt to reinstate the dynasty and was confined to the mandarins, rather than a popular movement with a broad platform for political and social reform.

With the turn of the century these nationalists were greatly inspired and influenced by the corresponding nationalist movements in China and Japan. The emergence of Japan as an important power after its spectacular victory over Russia in 1905, kindled the dream of a strong and free Vietnam. The Vietnamese nationalists came to be convinced that the modernisation of Vietnam by providing more educational facilities, would make the country powerful enough to oust the French. To this was added the example of Chinese nationalists who under the Kuomintang, were seeking to overthrow the Manchu Emperor and to establish a nationalist, republican government. It was through China that the Vietnamese nationalists learned of the need for reforms, and the revolutionary ways of achieving them. After 1917, when the Manchu regime fell, Canton became an important centre for organising the Vietnamese movements against the French. It was here that they came into contact with the revolutionary nationalism of Europe. In the next decade, various movements led by members of the imperial family as well as others, continued to resist the French rule. Most of these attempts were put down by the French rulers. However, there were other underground movements largely confined to Tongking and Cochin-China which continued to nurture the nationalist ferment.

In 1927, the Vietnamese revolutionists in Canton formed the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dong). The party's organisation was influenced by the KMT and hence adopted the same name and same doctrines as the KMT. The Party aimed

to overthrow the French rule by force with the Chinese aid. In February 1930, this VNQDD launched a revolution against the French, known as the "Yen-Bay Uprising". This was, however, crushed. After this the Nationalist Party found it almost impossible to launch any armed revolt against the French.

The period between the two World Wars witnessed an increased intensity in the movements, with correspondingly increased demands from the French rulers. This was also a period which introduced elements of western ideologies into the Vietnamese nationalist movement. Many of the Vietnamese who were in France including students, workers and others who had taken part in the French war effort during the Great War of 1914-18 had learned at first hand about the French Revolution, French nationalism and their technological progress. From the left wing elements in France, they had also come to know of French Socialism and later on Communism. They came to believe that only the western methods and tools would help in ousting French imperialism. The Bolshevik revolution, its anti-imperialist posture, and the Soviet effort to transform Russia into a modern state also had a deep impact on the Vietnamese nationalists. For many of them the dynamic methods of Soviet Russia appealed as the only effective technique for bringing about the anti-colonial revolution and modernisation. Hence in the 1920s the pro-Russian and pro-Communist elements came to be introduced into the Nationalist movement. They were also highly influenced by the teachings of Sun Yat Sen.

The resurgence of Vietnamese nationalism in 1920s and more especially the birth of the Communist movement there could be traced to the emergence of one personality—Nguyen Ai Quoc alias Ho Chi Minh, in the Indo-Chinese politics. Nguyen Ai Quoc whose original name was Nguyen Van Tranh, came into contact with the "western" concepts of nationalism and communism during his trip to Paris and London in the early years of his life. A staunch anti-imperialist, he organized an Association of Vietnamese Patriots, on whose behalf he sought to make an appeal to the statesmen assembled at Versailles in 1919.

In 1920, Nguyen Ai Quoc became the first Vietnamese member of the French Socialist Party but was later attracted to the Third International when it adopted a strong anti-colonialist position. In 1922, he attended as a member of the French Communist Party

the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern in Moscow and stayed back to study Communism, its technique and organization. In 1925 he came to Canton as an interpreter for Michael Borodin, a Russian adviser to the Kuomintang. He stayed there till 1927 when Borodin returned to the Soviet Union, following the rupture in the relations between Soviet Union and Kuomintang.

During this period Nguyen Ai Quoc showed himself as a capable organiser, and formed the Thanh-Nien or the Association of Revolutionary Annamite Youth among the Vietnamese exiles. Viewing the Vietnamese struggle against foreign rule as a part of an Asia-wide Movement, he organized a League of Oppressed Peoples of Asia with members from various Asian countries. Nguyen Ai Quoc at this time was primarily a nationalist whose chief objective was the independence of Vietnam. He seemed to have believed that Vietnam was not yet ready for Communism and that a Communist Party could not be organized there. A nationalist and socialist revolutionary platform alone could be understood by the people. He felt that Sun Yat Sen's Three Principles, a type of nationalism which combined independence, democracy and the economic well-being of the people, would be adaptable to Vietnam. As the instrument for achieving his objective he formed a new Party called Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth and enlisted for the cause several Vietnamese in Canton. These Vietnamese went back to Vietnam and organized revolutionary cells. After 1927, the headquarters of this Association moved from Canton to Hongkong from where it directed the activities within Vietnam and recruited and trained its followers.

The next few years witnessed an intra-party struggle in this movement which led to the formation of three different Communist Parties; one called the Indochine Communist Party in Northern Vietnam, the other called Annamese Communist Party and the third, Indo-Chinese Communist Union. These groups were opposed to one another and vied for recognition from Comintern. The Comintern sent Ho Chi Minh to unite these parties. The three were finally united into a Vietnamese Communist Party in February 1930. In October 1930 this party got enlarged into an Indo-Chinese Communist Party (ICP). The ICP soon expanded in its membership and strength and came to include a number of intellectuals and even officials, who were motivated not so much by Communist ideology

as by nationalism. Ho became its chief liaison with the different Comintern bodies and as such wielded authority over the party from outside the country

After 1935, when the Seventh Comintern Congress advocated "popular fronts", Ho Chi Minh sought co-operation with anti-French nationalists of all affiliations.

It was decided that the Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minto Hoi (The Association for Vietnam Independence League, known shortly as Dong Minh Hoi) should resume its activities.[1] It was also decided to organise a broad united front which would secure national unity in order to meet the new situation in Indo-China. Towards this end the ICP formed, in May 1941, the Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh called simply as the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh had three basic goals : to expel the French and Japanese "fascists" and restore the independence of Vietnam, to ally with the democracies who fight against fascism and aggression, and to establish a Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It stressed mainly nationalism and patriotism and relegated the ideology of communism to the background.

Meanwhile in the late spring of 1941, with the support of the Chinese Government, the Vietnam Liberation League was born in Chinghsi. It included various parties and groups with Dong Minh Hoi as the nucleus. The League was the first united front, broad based organisation established during the war in China, and stressed its close alliance with China. The League experiment, however, failed very soon and it ceased to function in early 1942. Following this another attempt to form a similar front was made in Liuchow in June 1942. In October 1942 the Vietnamese Revolutionary League (Vietnam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi) came into existence. It included members of the Liberation League, the Phuc Quoc, the VNQDD and others but excluded the ICP and the Viet Minh which it held responsible for the failure of the Liberation League earlier. However towards the end of 1943, Ho Chi Minh came to be associated with the working of Dong Minh Hoi. After March 1944, Ho was able to secure control over this organisation which helped him to return home in September 1944.

His return was marked by increased activities on the part of the Viet Minh. It concentrated on organising itself and extending its strength. It formed a vast guerilla movement to seize local

power, as also model resistance bases against the Japanese in the highlands and midlands of North Vietnam. It also sought to mobilise the people and gain their support by means of propaganda. It changed its watchwords, forms of propaganda organisation and struggle so as to appeal to the masses more easily and lead them more rapidly towards the insurrection. For instance, it gave up its programme of Agrarian Revolution, deciding for the present not to confiscate land held by the landlords. It was keen to differentiate between the various types of landlords and at the same time win a good number of them over to the nationalist cause.

By the time the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the Viet Minh already had a semblance of control over seven provinces, Tongking and a reserve army of some ten thousand men with experience in guerilla warfare. It had also drawn up a post-war political and economic programme. Above all it had succeeded in creating a popular image as the only true exponent of the nationalist cause. Bao Dai and Kim had been discredited as Japanese collaborators and puppets. As for the Dong Minh Hoi, it would not be much effective as its fortunes depended on the support it received from and the control exercised on it by China.

Above all Ho Chi Minh had succeeded in stalling a direct Chinese interference in Vietnam. He could present the Chinese with the *fait accompli* of an independent Vietnam without Chinese aid.

The Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945 in the wake of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki found the Viet Minh well prepared for an insurrrection. At the news of the imminent surrender of Japan, the Viet Minh gave an order on 13 August for launching a general insurrection. On 16 August the People's Congress of the Provisional DRVN which met at Tan Trao village of Tuyen Quang province approved of the future Vietnamese strategy. It was to lead the masses to insurrection in order to disarm the Japanese before the arrival of the Allied forces in Indo-China; to wrest power from the Japanese and their puppet government and finally to welcome the Allied forces coming to disarm the Japanese troops stationed in Indo-China.[2]

This strategy succeeded at least partially. On 26 August Emperor Bao Dai abdicated in favour of Ho Chi Minh, Kim having resigned earlier. This facilitated the Viet Minh assuming charge

peacefully and without a break with the previous regime. This smooth transfer also helped in bettering the popular image of the new regime at home and strengthening its claim abroad. A National Liberation Committee, which included the Viet Minh as well as other political organizations and to which all sections of society including Confucianists and Catholics, conservatives and communists gave their support, was formed. Eight of its fifteen members belonged to the Viet Minh, five of these being communists. Bao Dai, now plain citizen of Vinh Thuy, became its Supreme Political Adviser. On 2 September, the National Liberation Committee proclaimed the independence of Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) was formed.

It looked as if at last the hopes of the nationalists were fulfilled and the colonial rule of the past sixty years had come to an end. The country had been united under a native rule to which the great majority lent its support. However these hopes were soon shattered and Vietnam returned to war and foreign rule as quickly as it got out of it. The DRVN were in unquestioned power only for a brief period of three weeks and the French returned to Saigon.

In fact the French had started their campaign to regain control of Indo-China from the Japanese much earlier. In their view, once Japan was defeated by the Allied forces in the Far East, there would be no other force to take over Vietnam. As Joseph Buttinger has shown, the French were either uninformed about or underestimated the activities of the Viet Minh and the real mood of the Vietnamese people.[3] The French had believed that their right to return to Indo-China would be based entirely on their participation in the war against Japan. This was why the French were anxious to have a part in the South-East Asia Supreme Command. The French aim was, however, defeated mainly by the American reluctance to restore France in Indo-China.[4] It is, however, doubtful whether the French would have been in a position to re-establish themselves peacefully, even if the United States had been acquiescent. It did not apparently occur to the French leaders that they would have to first re-establish themselves in the eyes of the Vietnamese people and that, in any event, the prospect of their being welcomed back to the seats of authority were slim. The French misconceived the Vietnamese resistance, believed that the people would on the whole welcome their return and refused to recognize the strength of the popular support behind the Viet Minh. Hence they began making

military preparations to take over Indo-China after the Japanese surrender.

The French also undertook to introduce political reforms not so much to please the indigenous population as to placate China and the United States who might place obstacles on the French return. On 24 March 1945 the French Provisional Government announced a federal set-up for Indo-China within the French Union, with a federal representative assembly having limited powers. These reforms divided Vietnam into five countries—a step which no Vietnamese could accept. However these "reforms" which claimed to give autonomy to the Indo-Chinese, actually only sought to restore the former colonial rule. It was, in fact, an announcement of the French determination to return Indo-China to the status of a colony. These changes left the Vietnamese indifferent, as they had demanded complete independence.

In August, Paris appointed Admiral Georges Thierry d' Argenlieu as the High Commissioner (the new designation for the Governor General) for Indo-China. A Carmelite monk on leave from his monastery, who had risen to high rank in the Free French Navy, Argenlieu shared General de Gaulle's vision of maintaining the glory of the French empire. A staunch conservative, he was given the specific task of re-establishing the French sovereignty.

Meanwhile, in July 1945, the Potsdam Conference had decided that following a Japanese surrender, Vietnam north of the 16th Parallel would be occupied by the Chinese armies and the Southern portion by the British. It was these British and Chinese forces and not the French who were assigned the task of disarming the Japanese and evacuating the Allied prisoners of war. This was clearly a rebuff to the French and an indignity that Charles de Gaulle could hardly forget.

When the French sought to re-enter Vietnam, there were three different elements to confront with—the British in the South, the Chinese in the North and the Viet Minh seeking to rule the entire Vietnam though its main base of power was Tongking in the north and Cochin-China in South Vietnam. The return of the French, therefore, mainly depended on the attitude of the occupation forces.

As between these two occupation forces, the French could expect sympathy and support from the British, both as a European and a colonial power. It could not, however, expect the same from

the Chinese. The British and the Chinese also differed in their attitude to their respective missions on hand. The British Government viewed it as a military assignment of disarming the Japanese and restoring order. The British Commander of the occupying forces, General Gracey, however, viewed it even more broadly. He took it upon himself to restore to the French the territory under his command. The Chinese, on the other hand, had a different view. Whatever might have been the attitude of the Chinese Government,[5] the occupation authorities under Lu Han believed that China should support and assist Vietnam in obtaining independence. Lu Han was openly hostile to the French and helped in bringing the various sections of the nationalists under one fold, with a view to forming an independent government which would be a Chinese satellite.

Hence the French looked forward to the British for help in reinstating themselves in power in the British zone. To this was added another favourable factor. The Viet Minh which was firmly entrenched and efficiently organized in the North, was comparatively weak in the South. Cochin-China was disunited and ill-prepared for independence. This explained why the French when they attempted to return to Vietnam did so in the region south of the 16th Parallel.

The fortnight between the arrival of the British forces in the middle of September and the outbreak of hostilities in Saigon, was a crucial period in the recent history of Vietnam. The events during this interval considerably moulded the future of Indo-China. It was a time when the French could have changed their course completely and helped to avoid eight years of bloodshed. As Ellen J. Hammer puts it:

> This was a time when a man of prestige and authority might have had the foresight and the power to break into the past and make a gift to the Vietnamese of the independence they expected. It was a time to be generous while a grant of independence would still have constituted generosity, and not simply a concession wrung from France when the French had no other alternative.[6]

General de Gaulle who, seventeen years later, had the vision and courage of conviction to withdraw the French rule from Algeria, was in 1945 consumed by a determination to rebuild France's colonial empire as a means of restoring its shattered prestige.

The arrival of the British forces accompanied by some French soldiers led to a strained atmosphere in Vietnam. Very soon anti-

French activities spread, leading to the French seeking British protection. The British commander, now faced with a political problem, tried to solve it by freeing the French prisoners of war from the Vietnamese jails and rearming them. The British decision was of momentous consequence and earned for them the blame for the war which followed the French return. It led to violent incidents by the freed French forces against the Vietnamese. On 23 September they threw out the Vietnamese and seized all public buildings in Saigon, without encountering practically any resistance. Many of the Vietnamese leaders in Saigon escaped into the countryside. The centre of nationalist resistance shifted to Hanoi in the North.

On 3 October more French troops led by General Leclerc landed in Saigon. This was followed by rapid re-establishment of French control over the towns and principal roads in Cochin-China. On 9 October, the French signed an agreement with the British in London by which the British recognized the French civil administration as the only one entitled to direct non-military affairs south of the 16th Parallel. The French in the subsequent years were critical of the British for not supplying them with adequate shipping to bring their men and arms to the Far East and as being lukewarm to the French effort to re-establish their authority over Indo-China. The events of September 1945, however, belied this. Whatever might have been the views of the British Labour Government and the Supreme Allied Commander on the restoration of French rule in Indo-China, the local commander, by his actions had contributed his best efforts to facilitate the return of the French.

Following the re-establishment of their authority in the South, the French conducted negotiations with the Chinese occupation forces in the North, where the Viet Minh continued to rule with the tacit approval of the Chinese. There were many issues, mainly economical, pending between the Chinese and the French. Negotiations on various issues started in September 1945 and went on for several months. The Chinese were in a better bargaining position due to their occupation of Vietnam. However the domestic and international factors contributed to an early departure of the Chinese and the conclusion of a Sino-French accord on 28 February. By this agreement the Chinese promised to withdraw their troops from Vietnam by 31 March 1946. In return for this, France renounced its extra-territorial rights and concessions in China. It also guaranteed exemption from customs and transit duties to the Chinese

merchandise shipped over the Haiphong-Kunming Railway and promised a free zone for Chinese goods at Haiphong. By the summer of 1946, the Chinese finally left Indo-China.

The signing of this treaty by the Chinese Government had important consequences. It was a serious blow to the emergence of a vigorous nationalism. The Chinese agreement to leave Indo-China also meant that the Vietnamese were now face to face with the French who made ready to reconquer the area by force. This meant either an open military confrontation between the two or alternatively negotiations towards a mutually acceptable arrangement. For their own reasons both the parties preferred the latter course. The need to solve the immediate problems like famine and illiteracy within its own jurisdiction made the Viet Minh seek peace. It also realized that no effective international support could be expected for the nationalist cause. Under the circumstances Ho chose to temporize and expressed readiness to negotiate with the French without, however, giving up his basic objectives.

The French on their part were increasingly cognizant of the fact that the Viet Minh represented a national movement which could not be subdued easily or quickly. They had also, by January 1946, reached the end of their search for an alternative to Ho Chi Minh. Hence the negotiations which had already been going on at an unofficial level, received a momentum after the Franco-Chinese agreement.

On 6 March 1946, the French Commissioner in Tongking, Jean Sainteny signed an agreement in Hanoi with Ho Chi Minh by which France recognized the DRVN as a "free State with its own government, parliament, army and finances, forming a part of the Indo-Chinese federation and the French Union".[7] The French pledged themselves to a referendum to determine whether the three provinces of Tongking, Annam and Cochin-China should be united. In return, the Vietnamese agreed not to oppose the French army when it arrived to relieve the Chinese. This "preliminary accord" was to be followed by "friendly and open negotiations".

The 6 March Agreement enabled both the sides to achieve their limited aims and helped to provide for the immediate cessation of hostilities. On its significance to the Viet Minh cause, Joseph Buttinger wrote :

> ...The deal of March 1946, between the French and the Communists was as much a condition for the eventual triumph of Vietnamese communism as was the treaty of Brest-Litovsk for the victory of the Bolshevik revolution.[8]

The 6 March Accord might have very well become a historic document and established the basis for peace in Vietnam but for the French policy of "divide and rule". While on the one hand, it arrived at an agreement based on the unity of Vietnam, on the other hand, it continued to encourage the separatist tendencies in Cochin-China in order to keep it away from Northern control. The Dalat Conference held on 18 April only confirmed this French insistence and showed up more clearly the basic disagreements between the two parties.[9] It was difficult to be optimistic after Dalat.

Negotiations, however, continued and on 6 July talks between the DRVN and the French Government began at Fontainebleau in France. The Conference, from its very beginning, was headed for failure due to the unilateral actions of d' Argenlieu back in Indo-China. On 30 May, he had recognized Cochin-China, apparently without any authorisation from Paris, as a "free state" with its own army, finances etc. On 1 June, this "Autonomous Republic of Cochin-China" was proclaimed in Saigon. Following this on 3 June the French Commissioner for Cochin-China, Jean Cedile, signed a new convention with the new regime. The Viet Minh viewed these actions of the French as rank betrayal of their confidence. Nor did the French Government show itself to be keen on an agreement. All that could be salvaged out of it was a *modus vivendi* which avoided all the vital issues and confined itself to economic and cultural questions. It also provided for another conference not later than January 1947, to negotiate a final treaty. The Vietnamese, once again, seemed to have given way on many issues and agreed to postpone any settlement of their independence for a third time.

Outbreak of The War

The Fontainebleau Conference marked the last effort at negotiation in an atmosphere of comparative peace. Very soon after this, hostilities broke out. On 20 November occurred what has come to be known as the "Haiphong incident". A Chinese junk loaded with contraband attempting to reach the port of Haiphong to unload supplies for the Vietnamese, was seized by a French patrol boat. The local Vietnamese militia fired at the French boat. Fighting soon spread into the city and continued for two days. Following this the relations between the Vietnamese and the French became further strained. In spite of repeated appeals from Ho Chi Minh for a cease-fire, the French reinforced their military forces throughout Vietnam. This deterred the Viet Minh Government from offering any more concessions. Instead

the Viet Minh replaced its regular forces with Tu Ve, its militia. On 19 December Tu Ve launched an attack on the French military posts and installations. This marked the beginning of the real "Indo-China War". Thus came to an end the Vietnamese efforts for settling the issue of their independence peacefully.

The year 1946 was truly an important period in Vietnamese history. During this period, the possibilities of a compromise were greater than at any other time later on. The Communists had not yet established their predominance either within the Viet Minh or on the public at large. The Vietnamese too were in a mood to yield greater concessions to France in order to achieve political unity and independence. As for the French in Indo-China, their military reinforcements had not yet reached a level as to enable them plan a massive military strike against the DRVN. Hence the time was opportune to arrive at some kind of a workable arrangement between the two. This was, however, thwarted both because of the narrow outlook and policies of the conservative representatives of the French Government in Indo-China and their conviction that they could restore the French authority with less than fundamental concessions. Apportioning the responsibility for the outbreak of the war, Hammer concludes that "the Vietnamese chose the date on which it broke out, but the policy followed by members of the French administration in Saigon made the war almost inevitable."[10] This policy lay in systematically obstructing the implementation of the 6 March Agreement. Militarily, as Bernard B. Fall wrote, "the French forces sent to Indo-China were too strong for France to resist the temptation of using them; yet not strong enough to keep the Viet Minh from trying to solve the whole political problem by throwing the French into the sea."[11]

However, even in the midst of this fighting, the Viet Minh continued to make efforts to negotiate the future of Vietnam. These attempts ended abortively as France continued to believe in its tactics of encouraging separatist tendencies and revived its efforts to find an alternative to Ho. The most natural choice seemed to be the ex-Emperor Bao Dai who, after serving for a brief period with the DRVN, was living in Hongkong where some Vietnamese nationalists were trying for restoration of his power against Ho.

The French choice fell on Bao Dai mainly because the latter had shown himself in the past as a man of weak character, amenable to external control. They believed Bao Dai would be content to accept

terms which the French would be willing to grant and would succeed in making the Vietnamese agree to them. The beginning of 1947 witnessed repeated overtures from the French to Bao Dai to form an alternate government. In spite of Bao Dai's reluctance to settle for less than full independence, he was persuaded to do so by many sections in Vietnam which rallied around him either because of old loyalties to the Royal Family or because they saw in it an opportunity to form an opposition to the Viet Minh. In the fall of 1947, Bao Dai accepted the demand by these Vietnamese with a view, as he put it, "to get independence and unity" for Vietnam. However on 7 December he signed a statement of terms with the French High Commissioner Emile Bollaert which gave Vietnam a status far short of independence.

This dissatisfied many of Bao Dai's supporters and drove away many non-communist nationalists like Ngo Dinh Diem and Tran Van Ly from Bao Dai's future government. However the French themselves found in Bao Dai's willingness, a political weapon against Ho Chi Minh and a justification for military action against the Viet Minh. This marked the beginning of a Bao Dai solution to the Vietnam crisis and became the French policy for the next six and a half years.

With this decision of Bao Dai to accept the French offer, the Vietnamese lost another opportunity in their struggle against the French colonial rule. Many in Vietnam had felt, at this time, only a Bao Dai-Ho Chi Minh combination would bring about a peaceful independence to Vietnam. Among them were Princes Buu Hoi and Buu Loc, cousins of Bao Dai. A similar proposal was made by Ho Chi Minh himself who asked Bao Dai to carry on negotiations with the French on his behalf. Such a joint solution, had it been accepted by Bao Dai and his supporters, would have not only strengthened his bargaining position *vis-a-vis* the French, but might have also prevented a shift of power within the Viet Minh to the extremists.

The rejection of such a solution placed Bao Dai in a dilemma between the French intentions and the Vietnamese objectives. The only way Bao Dai could win the people over would be by securing unity and independence which the French had refused to Ho Chi Minh. On the other hand the French brought out and supported Bao Dai only because they believed he could be counted upon not to be intransigently nationalistic. The Bao Dai solution, from its very beginning, was doomed to fail, mainly because the French were keen

on holding on to their colonial privileges even while promising him full freedom. Bao Dai came to be regarded as a French stooge and a traitor to the cause of Vietnamese independence. Instead of splitting up the resistance, as the French had hoped, Bao Dai's association with the French ended up by making the Viet Minh more popular. The Viet Minh came to be regarded as the only genuine rebels against the colonial rule whose sacrifices and struggle were responsible for the little amount of independence Vietnam secured.

The opposition of prominent Vietnamese leaders to the French offer made Bao Dai seek more precise assurances from the French. In the process he allowed the French "to beg him, to cajole, humour, or threaten him in their determination to recruit his services". [12] The deadlock was finally broken when on 27 May 1948, General Nguyen Van Xuan, the President of the Cochin-Chinese "Republic", formed a "Central Government of Vietnam" from among the Bao Dai supporters. Xuan himself became its President. With the formation of the Xuan Government, which was neither popular nor powerful, the practice of two Vietnamese governments came into operation.

On 5 June, Bao Dai acting on behalf of the Xuan Government, arrived at an agreement with Bollaert. The Ha Long Bay Agreement, as it was called, recognized "independence" for Vietnam. But it had hedged the independence with so many qualifications that the Agreement was no more than a repetition of the Accord of 6 December of the previous year. Instead of rallying the nationalists, it only confirmed their opposition to the French-sponsored regime and even crystallised more support around Ho Chi Minh.

Meanwhile, portentous developments were taking place in China. By the beginning of 1949, the legions of Mao Tse-tung gained such successes as to raise the spectre of a Communist China. A Communist regime in China, the French and Bao Dai feared, might extend active support to the Viet Minh. Hence both the French as well as Bao Dai were convinced of the need to arrive at an early agreement. On 8 March 1949 the Auriol-Bao Dai Agreement was arrived at the Elysee Palace in Paris. The Elysee Accords recognized the independence of Vietnam. However the Vietnamese were given only a limited freedom in their diplomatic contacts and were denied the powers to formulate their own military and foreign policy. The French position in Vietnam was preserved. By signing these

accords, Bao Dai had accepted terms which had been rejected by Ho Chi Minh at Fontainebleau in 1946. The "independent Vietnam" of the Elysee Accords was, in effect, a mere protectorate, a kind of extension of the French-founded regime at Cochin-China to the whole country. Even these unsatisfactory Elysee Accords were not ratified by the French National Assembly as late as February 1950 thereby increasing the suspicions of the restive Vietnamese.

Meanwhile proposals continued to be put forward for unity between the Viet Minh and the newly established Government with Bao Dai as Chief of State, but this time from the latter's side. What exactly were the motives behind these moves were not clear. It might be to get the support of the nationalist leaders who did not belong to either of the two. Or it might have been to strengthen the Vietnamese bargaining position *vis-a-vis* the French Government. As it looked very logical, Bao Dai sought to threaten the French with a possible unity with Ho Chi Minh, in order to get more concessions as well as an early ratification of the Elysee Accords.

But these offers were not taken seriously by the Viet Minh who had denounced the various Accords and called Xuan a puppet of the French. The successes of the Communists in China too strengthened the hopes of the Viet Minh in their struggle against the French. Hence it chose not to recognize the Bao Dai Government. This was also a period when within the Viet Minh itself, the extremists had gained an upper hand. The war in Vietnam had also, in the meantime, come to attract increasing attention in the United States which welcomed the Elysee Accords. Hence to the Viet Minh the war became not only a struggle against French colonialism but against "Franco-American imperialism".

By the end of 1949 the international situation had hardened and the Western sensitiveness about Communism intensified. The year was crucial for Vietnam as the war there came to be a part of the confrontation between the Western and Communist blocs. With this cold war entering into Indo-China, the division between the Viet Minh and the Bao Dai's Government became sharper. In January 1950, the Soviet Union and Communist China recognized the Viet Minh as the Government of Vietnam. Following this, the French National Assembly promptly ratified the Elysee Accords on 2 February and the Government headed by Bao Dai officially came into existence. It was immediately recognized by the United States and Braitin, followed by other countries in the Western bloc.

With the recognition of the two governments by the various countries, the war in Vietnam graduated into a civil war—the Bao Dai government now appearing as a cover for French military action and adding respectability to it. The Indo-China war also came to be described as an ideological struggle between the Bao Dai Government supported and aided by the Western bloc and the Viet Minh by the Communist bloc. Efforts were made to present the struggle in Vietnam as one between Democracy and Communism. This view did not earn the support of neutral nationalists or *attentistes* for the new Government, let alone wean away the nationalists from the Viet Minh. For most Vietnamese the war continued to be a nationalist struggle against the French who continued to wield enormous power in Vietnam and control important portfolios.

To this resentment over the French dominance, were added the scandals of the French economic exploitation which came to be publicised in the *affaire des generaux*, early in 1950. There was much of mudslinging when the various French political parties like the Communist Party, M.R.P. and the Gaullists exploited the *affaire* to their own political benefit. The entire war in Indo-China was shown as one of dirt and corruption and as an "unclean colonialist racket".[13] The war there was criticised, especially by the Communists, as one which served the purposes of Big Business and racketeers. The investigations of the Committee of Inquiry which went into the *affaire* not only confirmed these allegations, but also revealed that many Vietnamese in high positions, who were close associates of Bao Dai, were involved in this racketeering. All this did not redound to the popularity of the Bao Dai Government.

Meanwhile, the war in Indo-China underwent a different military character. While the French continued to adopt the conventional methods of a colonial reconquest, the Viet Minh switched over to guerilla warfare with the prospects of a protracted war. The Viet Minh were helped in this by their political programme which was quite simple, namely independence. Soon the Viet Minh were able to hold much of the countryside including the hill-tribe areas, while the French could control only the low-lands, more especially the cities. The war of attrition that ensued continued till 1954, resulting in an ever-increasing drain on the trained officers as well as economic resources of France. This made Indo-China the Number One problem for France and for certain inter-related reasons, an important issue to the United States.

In the face of the mounting criticism, both domestic and foreign, and the growing pressure from the Vietnamese nationalists, the French once again agreed to open negotiations with the three Indo-Chinese states. The Pau Conference which started in June 1950 in France, with a view to "perfecting the independence" that had been granted by the Elysee Accords, ended in November after five gruelling months of negotiations among the three Indo-Chinese states and France. This Conference was designed to implement the transfer from France to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, of the services of immigration, communications, foreign trade, customs and finances. The negotiations were complex and involved the complicated relations of the three States with one another and with France. While giving more freedom in foreign affairs, these Agreements maintained France's dominant role in military affairs, finance and other fields of special interest to the metropolis. Even as regards the freedom in foreign affairs, when it came to actual implementation the Vietnamese were considerably limited by the French. To many Vietnamese the Pau Agreements did not mean perfecting their independence. They still felt themselves to be "Second-Class Citizens".

Nor were the Vietnamese enthusiastic about the decision to organise a native army. Ho Chi Minh called it the policy of "using Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese and nursing the war by means of warfare".[14]

As the war dragged on, the strain on France became very substantial. An end to the war did not appear near and the military reverses increased. The French came to be convinced of the need to end the costly adventure. As popular criticism and disgust with the continuing war grew in intensity, the French opinion to make peace in Indo-China and withdraw from the region gained in strength. At the same time, the Associated States of Indo-China too brought tremendous pressure on France to reopen negotiations on their future status.

The Laniel Government which came to power in June 1953, applied itself immediately to the Indo-Chinese situation. On 3 July, it offered to reopen negotiations with the three Governments in order to "perfect" their independence and sovereignty by transferring to them various functions which remained under the French control, and to settle other outstanding problems. The talks which began soon after this between France and the three States on a bilateral basis, resulted in the signing of treaties with Laos and Cambodia. As for Vietnam, the French offer marked the beginning of a series of

political activities giving rise to various demands. Negotiations between France and Vietnam started on 8 March, 1954 in Paris.

In the meantime, attempts were being made, almost throughout 1953, by many influential personalities, both French and Vietnamese, to open some kind of negotiations with the Viet Minh. These efforts, however, came to nothing. The Berlin Conference of Foreign Ministers held in February 1954 had agreed to hold a conference in Geneva at the end of April to settle "outstanding issues in the Far East" such as Korea and Indo-China.

The Geneva Conference which opened on 26 April 1954, came to be dominated by the war that was going on in Indo-China and the need to bring about peace there. The fall of Dien Bien Phu on 8 May to the Viet Minh, sealed the fate of the French side and thereby hastened the French withdrawal from Vietnam, both politically and militarily. On 12 May two draft treaties were made public. By one France had recognized Vietnam as "a fully independent and sovereign state" and by the other, Vietnam accepted membership within the French Union. These treaties were signed on 4 June, 1954 and the French rule over Vietnam came to an end after nearly seventy years.

The military withdrawal of France was brought about by the Geneva Agreements of July 1954 which put an end to the eight year old war. Peace descended on Vietnam at last, but only at the price of a division of the country. The Geneva Decisions once again left Vietnam divided along the 17th parallel into two distinct rival states, each one to pursue its own course. While bringing peace, only to be shattered by another prolonged war, it left the Vietnamese unenthusiastic about the Geneva Agreements.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dong Minh Hoi was organised in 1935 in Nanking, mainly by the members of the Viet-Nam Independence Party. It co-operated with the ICP in the common struggle for independence. For a time it had some influence in the Vietnamese rural areas.
2. Truong Chinh, *Primer for Revolt* (New York, 1963), p. 14.
3. Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam : A Dragon Embattled, From Colonialism to the Viet Minh* (New York, 1967), p. 303.
4. This aspect has been dealt with in Chapter II.

5. King C. Chen believes that the Chinese Government adopted a policy of neutrality towards the Franco-Vietnamese relations. It believed its role in Indo-China to be one of merely carrying out military occupation. Chen, *Vietnam And China 1938-1954* (Princeton, 1969), Chapter III.
6. Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indo-China* (Stanford, 1954), p. 114.
7. Allan B. Cole, ed., *Conflict in Indo-China and International Repercussions, A Documentary History 1946-55* (Ithaca, 1956), p. 40.
8. Joseph Buttinger, "The Miracle of Viet-Nam", in Richard W. Liudholm, ed., *Viet-Nam, The First Five Years* (East Lansing, 1959), p. 25.
9. The Dalat Conference between the French Administration in Saigon a nd the Vietnamese at the resort city of Dalat in Southern Annam, was in the nature of a preliminary conference. It was to pave the way for a later and definitive meeting in Paris, which had been promised in the 6 March Agreement.
10. Hammer, n. 6, pp. 188-9.
11. Bernard B. Fall, *Street without Joy* (Harrisburg, 1961), p. 26.
12. Alexander Werth, *France 1940-1955* (London, 1956), p. 450.
13. A detailed description of the entire *affaire* and the investigations of the Committee of Inquiry is given by Werth, *ibid.*, pp. 455-69.
14. Ho Chi Minh, *Viet Nam* (Calcutta, 1968), p. 137.

II

Pawn In The Power Game

It was not until the spring of 1940, that Indo-China emerged on the front page of the American press and the leading American news agencies began giving it regular coverage. In June 1940, the French resistance against Germany collapsed in Europe, and consequently against Japanese pressure in Asia. This threw the future of the French colonies into doubt, thus making developments in Indo-China of considerable concern to the military planners of Britain and the United States.

Until now, little was known in the United States of the history and problems of Indo-China. This was due chiefly to the fact that as a French-speaking area, Indo-China was less known to the Americans than the British colonies. American economic interests in this area had never been great and hence, even though Indo-China was very close to the American-administered Philippines, there was very little intercourse between the two areas. Moreover, the Americans heard little of the region's problems from the Metropolitan French, as the French themselves were reluctant to publicize those problems. It was little wonder, therefore, that almost until 1940, when the United States came to

be closely concerned with the war, the popular view in that country of Indo-China was the same generalised conception held of all the colonies; that it was a rule of "white exploiter lording over all the good natives".[1] It was only the role assigned to Indo-China in the hemispheric plans of Japan, the potential enemy, that caused the United States to pay serious attention to the developments in Indo-China. It was this consideration which prompted the United States to open a consulate at Hanoi in 1939, as also to protect the Haiphong-Yunnan Railway, which carried a large portion of the supplies for the National Government of China.

The latter half of 1940 witnessed increasing pressure from an expansionist Japan on France in South-East Asia. Although France recognized the danger to Indo-China, it was not in a position to withstand these pressures, due to its preoccupation with the menacing situation in Europe. The collapse of French resistance in Europe encouraged the Japanese expansionists, who found in it an opportunity to realise their objectives of establishing a "New Order in Greater East Asia". On 20 June 1940, an agreement was signed between Japan and France, by which the latter recognized Japan's paramount interests in China. This Agreement was followed by more and more demands by Japan, all of which the French had to concede. In this the Japanese were obviously encouraged by the appraisal that there was probably little chance of the British coming to the aid of the French in the Far East. Britain and Holland were the only two European Powers which had colonial interests in this region and from whom France could have hoped for help in Indo-China. But their position was precarious and Britain had to concentrate on its own desperate struggle for survival.

The United States which could have helped France at that time, was in a state of indecision. On 2 July 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a proclamation requiring export licences for a group of products including machine tools in which the Japanese were interested.[2] On 6 July 1940, the White House spokesman, Stephen T. Early, declared that the "Government of the United States wants to see... an application of the Monroe Doctrine in Europe and Asia similar to the interpretation and application for this hemisphere.... For example, in the case of French Indo-China, we think the disposition should be decided among the Asiatic countries." The United States preferred to follow a policy of non-

involvement in Indo-China. On 30 June 1940, Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles told the French Ambassador in Washington that "considering the general situation, the Government of the United States did not believe that it would enter into conflict with Japan, and that, *should the latter attack Indo-China, the United States would not oppose such an action*".[3] The United States probably calculated that the Japanese who were involved with the Chinese would not take any military action in Indo-China. This is confirmed by Cordell Hull the Secretary of State, who wrote, "American policy should be confined to encouraging countries like Indo-China...to delay and parley and hold out to the last minute against Japan's demands", and that "Japan would not dare make a military attack at this time".[4] As a manifestation of this approach of avoiding immediate non-involvement in Indo-China, the US Government turned down on 15 September 1940, a request made by General Martin, the French commander in Tongking, to the Commander of US Naval Forces in the Philippines, for a naval demonstration in the Gulf of Tongking. The US Government had also forbidden delivery of any equipment to Indo-China and thus frustrated the efforts of General Catroux, the French Governor-General in Indo-China, who sent a purchasing mission to the United States to acquire 120 modern fighter aircraft and modern anti-aircraft artillery to be supplied out of the sizeable orders that France had already placed with American manufacturers.[5] The Vichy Government of France once again pleaded for further aid from the United States before coming to an agreement with Japan on Indo-China.

In its reluctance to come to the help of the French resistance to Japan in Indo-China, the United States even seemed to become reconciled to the Japanese extortion of concessions. On 22 August 1940, Sumner Welles, the Under Secretary of State, informed Vichy that the United States was unable to come to the aid of Indo-China, but that it "appreciated the difficulties with which the French Government was faced and did not consider that it would be justified in reproaching France if certain military facilities were accorded Japan".[6] The coming months witnessed far-reaching demands by the Japanese on the Indo-Chinese authorities. These were followed by a Japanese military attack towards the middle of September 1940. The US Government was still hesitant and limited its action to proclaiming itself against the Japanese invasion. Cordell Hull confined himself to pronounce that this was "upsetting" the *status quo* under "duress", and that the United States disapproved of such action.[7]

The United States also refused to revise its decision not to permit the Hanoi government to purchase american arms. Apart from its unwillingness to get involved, the United States was also afraid that these arms might fall into German hands, due to the ties which the Hanoi authorities had with the Vichy Government.

The American reluctance to intervene in the situation with any active help might also be explained by its strained relations with the Vichy government of France at this time. The United States was quite annoyed with the collaboration of the Petain Government with Hitler and was angered by the Montoire meeting of 24 October 1940 between Marshal Petain and Hitler, in which the former promised to help Germany in defeating England.[8] In a letter to Petain, President Roosevelt sternly warned France that such an agreement would wreck the friendship of the United States with France and would "permanently remove any chance that this Government would be disposed to give any assistance to the French people in their distress.... If France pursued such a policy...the United States could make no effort when the appropriate time came to exercise its influence to ensure to France the retention of her overseas possessions."[9] This also showed that to some extent the United States was being influenced in its Asian policy by the European situation.

William Langer, the noted American historian, however, defends the US inaction as that the United States was not sufficiently prepared in the summer of 1940 to accept the challenge thrown by either Germany or Japan, even if American public opinion had been favourable.[10] The prevailing mood of public opinion made the American Government refuse to be drawn into an outright opposition to the Japanese moves. These latest Japanese moves had undoubtedly shocked the public, but not enough to support any intensification of the American commitment in that area, especially at a time when Hitler's victories in Europe were alarming. The view which generally prevailed in the Press was that the United States could not afford to become involved in the Far East and that some Japanese successes would have to be accepted.

This reluctance of the public assumed even more significance as it happened to be a Presidential election year. Isolationism or at least non-interventionism was still dominating the Congress and formed the main plank of the Republican campaigns. The President was constrained to move with the greatest caution. American aid to Britain had come to assume No. 1 priority in the governmental policy and hence, it was enough for the moment that the nation

followed the government lead to the extent of declaring itself on the side of Britain and against the Axis.

The Japanese invasion in July 1941 and the American reaction

The Japanese invasion of Indo-China in July 1941, however resulted in Indo-China emerging as an important front in the Far Eastern war and led to a worldwide realignment. According to some writers like Griswold and F. C. Jones, this open attack accelerated the development of American-Japanese antagonism on the one hand, and the Japanese adherence to the Axis on the other, thus contributing towards the merging of the European and Far Eastern conflicts.[11]

The earlier part of 1941 witnessed an intensification of the war in Europe. By December 1940, following the fall of France, the danger to England seemed most acute, and this, in turn, made the position of a neutral United States too anxious. The United States was compelled to take various steps, in complete disregard of its neutral obligations, to offset the German military conquests. The passage of the Lend-Lease Act on 11 March 1941, reduced still further, the gap between the United States' non-belligerency and open participation in the war on the side of the Allies.

These months also saw a greater anxiety in Washington of the danger of Japan to the American Far Eastern possessions. On 11 February 1941, President Roosevelt for the first time referred, though indirectly, to the possibility of the United States getting involved in a Far Eastern War. On 20 February, it was revealed in Washington that latest types of American bombers were being flown across the Pacific to Singapore, and that the United States was also speeding reinforcements of aircraft to its Pacific Fleet. These American moves were denounced by Japan, which described them as encirclement of Japan. The acuteness of the situation increased Japan's drive to strengthen its position in the Far East. Following Hitler's attack on Russia in June 1941, Japan proceeded to occupy Southern Indo-China. On 24 July 1941, the Japanese-Vichy agreement was announced; by this agreement the Japanese armed forces were given authority to occupy all vital airports and strategic bases in French Indo-China.

Japan's successive moves began to have their impact on American opinion and the Administration found it possible to take a stronger public stand than previously. The United States, as has been pointed out, disapproved of and deprecated the French concessions. Sumner Welles, contrary to an earlier statement of his own, denied having approved any French concessions to Japan at any time.[12] In fact, even before the agreement was concluded, in an attempt to prevent its conclusion, the American Ambassador to France,

William D. Leahy transmitted to the French an oral message from President Roosevelt, that "If Japan was the winner, the Japanese would take over French Indo-China, and if the Allies won, *we* would take it."[13] The United States and especially its Ambassador Leahy, seemed to be convinced that Germany was a party to the agreement. The repeated assurance of the French Government to the contrary, did not convince the United States, which found it, "too difficult to swallow". The United States interpreted this agreement as an effort by Germany to get the former involved in the Pacific.[14] The United States was also afraid the Japanese-Vichy agreement might encourage the Germans to demand French Africa from the Vichy Government, which the latter would find very difficult to refuse. One could thus say that July 1941 marked an important turning point in Vietnamese history. It could perhaps be called as the dividing line between a period of comparative peace and active war in the Pacific.

As a retaliatory step, the United States ordered the freezing of all Japanese assets in the United States.[15] It also suspended the conversations that were being held between Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles and Admiral Nomura of Japan in Washington. The United States also sought to help the Indo-Chinese authorities, in their border troubles with Thailand, by calling the attention of the Thai authorities to American pronouncements to preserve the *status quo* in Indo-China and by revoking licences for shipping ten military planes to Thailand.[16]

In the subsequent months, the Japanese drive to self-sufficiency gained more momentum, especially in the face of their fear that the United States might intervene in the Far East. This apprehension was reflected in the Japanese drive to rapidly influence the economy of Indo-China, through the military and diplomatic pressure which it brought to bear on the French authorities in Indo-China. The Japanese demands were met by the Vichy Government, as passed on to them by the Germans.[17]

This confronted the United States with two hard options. The first one was to enter into a two-ocean war against both Germany and Japan, in defence of its western Allies and to protect Indo-China, Singapore, Burma, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines from Japanese occupation. Or on the other hand, it could try to reach a broad-based agreement with Japan for the entire Pacific area, and concentrate its attention primarily across the Atlantic. This might also help in separating Japan from Germany. The United States chose the latter one, and throughout the year 1941, Cordell Hull

engaged himself in "exploratory conversations" with Japan. It was in this context that President Roosevelt proposed to the Japanese Government on 24 July 1941 the neutralization of Indo-China. He put forward the offer that

> if the Japanese Government would refrain from occupying Indo-China with its military and naval forces, or, had such steps actually been commenced, if the Japanese Government would withdraw such forces, the President could assure the Japanese Government that he would do everything within his powers to obtain from the Governments of China, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and of course the United States itself a binding and solemn declaration, providing Japan would undertake the same commitment, to regard Indo-China as a neutralised country in the same way in which Switzerland had up to now been regarded by the powers as a neutralized country.[18]

The United States Government repeated the proposal on 26 November 1941, as one of the bases for agreement, in what was called the "Hull Note". Even on 6 December 1941, on the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt addressed a message to the Japanese Emperor offering a non-aggression guarantee in exchange for the evacuation of Indo-China. The United States' proposal, however, did not get a favourable response from the Japanese Government who in a note handed over a few hours after the Pearl Harbor attack, called the "Hull Note" as "unacceptable" to them and as being only an extension of the open-door policy to Indo-China.[19]

While the United States was engaged in all these negotiations and peace proposals, it also tried to halt the movement of the Japanese expeditionary force to the South. When towards the end of November 1941, the Japanese moved further South in Indo-China, the United States viewed it as a serious threat to the Philippines, Burma and Singapore, and felt that this had to be halted. Under Secretary Sumner Welles sent a query on 2 December 1941, as to what Japan intended by their new occupation of Southern Indo-China.[20] With the attack on Pearl Harbor, however, the issue of Indo-China got merged in the broader issue of the Pacific War between Japan and the Allies, more especially, the United States.

US Attitude to the Issue of Colonialism

The United States all through its history has asserted its belief that all the peoples have the right to govern themselves and exercise

their liberty. Despite this, in actual practice, the United States has consistently avoided any involvement in anti-colonialist movements. American governmental leaders tended to regard colonial areas from the point of view of economic, commercial, and military considerations and their direct relevance to the United States. Since relations with the metropolitan states on these issues were regarded as of greater importance to American interests, the United States had not chosen to take an anti-colonialist posture as long as such a state of affairs prevailed. Broadly speaking this was the situation as far as the evolution of American policy on Indo-China was concerned.

It has been pointed out that the American leaders and people had shown very limited interest in Indo-China till virtually the fall of France. It was the looming conflict with Japan that induced American leaders to pay close attention to the land and its resources and to the temper of its people and rulers. The United States recognized the importance of the region to Japan, as a valuable source of economic resources like rubber and rice. It realized Indo-China could be used as a springboard by the Japanese to attack the British possessions and the areas from where the United States procured important primary commodities.

This consideration of Indo-China, as a strategic area in Japanese-American relations and the need to preserve it from Japanese occupation was of key importance to American policy-makers. The issue of self-determination in Indo-China hardly figured in their calculations at the time. Hence, the United States favoured the preservation of the *status quo* and the continuation of French control. This was expressed by Cordell Hull, in a Press Conference on 23 September 1940.[21] Again, the protest by the US Government against the surrender by the Petain Government of the Indo-Chinese bases to Japan seemed to indicate that the United States was keen that Indo-China should remain under French rule, even if it were that of the Vichyites. President Roosevelt in the course of his proposal for neutralizing Indo-China offered to procure a guarantee from the "pertinent powers" that "so long as the present emergency continued, the local French authorities in Indo-China would remain in control of the territory and would not be confronted with attempts to dislodge them on the part of de Gaullist or Free French agents or forces."[22]

The Vichy-Tokyo agreement of July 1941 conceding the Indo-Chinese bases, however, made the US authorities rethink on the

wisdom of allowing the French to continue to rule over Indo-China. Viewing the agreement as a further evidence of Vichy-Axis collaboration, the United States, as Ambassador Leahy recalled in his memoirs, interpreted it as "the end of the French colonies in Asia".[23] It also demonstrated to them the need to preserve intact the French colony from the Japanese.

The American dissatisfaction with the French action of yielding to Japanese demands also woke them up to the colonial conditions in Indo-China and the local opposition to the French rule. The awareness that popular dissatisfaction against colonial rulers had made the area fertile ground for Japanese propaganda, led American policy-makers to appraise more critically than earlier the performance of the colonial power. It was, however, the military debacle of the Allies in Southeast Asia after Pearl Harbor that led American policy-makers to face the question whether France should be permitted to regain Indo-China after the war. French misrule, Roosevelt believed, had made Indo-China the springboard for Japan's attack on the Philippines, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies.[24] In Roosevelt's eyes, according to Bernard Fall, the Indo-Chinese situation became the "scapegoat for all America's woes in the Pacific".[25]

The US President also indicated his scorn for the French rule in Indo-China by ignoring France completely in his proposal to Japan for neutralizing Indo-China. The Roosevelt proposal as also "the Hull Note" later on, simply overlooked the fact that there still existed in Indo-China a French administration, getting its orders from the Vichy Government—a fact that was noted by the Japanese in their reply to the Hull Note.

President Roosevelt eventually came to the strong conclusion that Indo-China should not be returned to the French but should be placed under an international trusteeship. In a letter to Cordell Hull, dated 24 January 1943, he expressed his contempt for the way the French had ruled the country. "France has had the country... for nearly one hundred years and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning", he wrote. "France has milked it", he went on "for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that."[26] The President also contrasted the French rule, with the US rule over the Philippines, and described the latter as "pattern of what men of goodwill look forward to in the future".[27]

The official policy of the United States, during these years, came to be based on the belief that countries with colonies should

begin to plan and prepare for the self-government of the colonial people and give them independence, when they become ready for and worthy of it.[28] With President Roosevelt himself, the problems of the colonial areas had become a "favourite topic",[29] thus "underscoring the differences between himself and his respected friend, Winston Churchill on the extension of the principles of the Atlantic Charter to such areas as Burma, Malaya, the Netherlands, East Indies and Indo-China".[30] The President expressed this view to the British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, during the Washington Conference of March 1943. He made it clear that he would not like a commitment to be made in advance that all the colonies in the Far East should go back to the countries which owned or controlled them prior to the War. The President, as Harry Hopkins had recorded, referred especially to the cases of Timor and Indo-China.[31]

Under this policy the President instructed Hull to present the idea of trusteeship for Indo-China to the Soviet Union at the Moscow Conference of October 1943, and he himself spoke of it to the Turkish and Egyptian representatives at Cairo in November 1943. Roosevelt, at this juncture, seemed to have entertained the idea of a trusteeship for Indo-China under three Commissioners—an American, a Chinese and a Briton.[32] He himself pleaded for support to his plan of trusteeship for Indo-China, at the various Conferences, in Cairo, Teheran and Yalta.[33] At the Yalta Conference of 1945, however, Roosevelt modified his plan so as to include one or two Indo-Chinese and even a French, a Filipino, a Chinese and a Russian.

The trusteeship plan continued to interest Roosevelt till his death in April 1945. He clung to the view that he "was going to do everything possible to give the people in that area (Indo-China) their independence".[34]

It is noteworthy that President Roosevelt opposed the idea of a French military mission being attached to the Southeast Asia Command for consultations regarding military operations affecting Indo-China. He instructed that no American approval should be given to such a mission and that no American representatives in the Far East, whether civilian or military, were authorized to make any decisions on political questions with the French mission or anyone else.[35] The United States also turned down the repeated requests from the French military authorities to participate in the Far Eastern war against Japan, and for representation in Pacific War Council. The French were anxious to get assistance in retaking Indo-China from the Japanese. They felt, that if the United States could get two

divisions of French troops to Indo-China in addition to the 50,000 already there,[36] the French would be able to recapture Indo-China with the help of the secret resistance groups. The United States interpreted the French request as implying assistance in the return of Indo-China to French control, and giving France a right to participation in lend-lease after the defeat of Germany.

Roosevelt was disinclined to respond favourably to the French request. The Joint Chiefs and the Combined Staff who studied it were also of the view that the transportation to the Pacific of two French divisions would involve an expenditure not justified by any assistance that could be expected from the French in the accomplishment of the main Allied war objective of the total defeat of Japan.[37] General Eisenhower, the Allied Supreme Commander in Europe, took the view that French participation in the Far Eastern War would detract the latter from its main effort in southern France. Hence the United States rejected the French request on the plea that Indo-China was not at that time included within the sphere of American Staff.

The President also ruled out any US material assistance to the French Resistance forces engaged in guerilla operations against the Japanese on Indo-China territory. In reply to a proposal from the Office of Strategic Services, he wrote that "the United States should do nothing in regard to resistance groups or in any other way in relation to Indo-China". In a memorandum to the Department of State he stated, "he did not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision nor did he want to get mixed up in any effort toward the liberation of Indo-China from the Japanese." Action at this juncture, he thought "was premature from both the military and civil point of view".[38] Not until February 1945, would he modify his position to some extent and agree to help the French underground in Indo-China. And even then such aid would be extended provided it did not interfere with planned operations in the area, that it would be limited to what was necessary for the defeat of the Japanese forces, and that it would not be construed as an official US recognition of the French interest in Indo-China.[39] As a consequence, when the Japanese attacked Saigon on 9 March 1945, the United States made no move to use its air power based in China in support of the French. The French came to depend on the British who supplied them equipment from Calcutta. It was only when all the organized units of the French had been destroyed, that the President

permitted the release of the 14th Air Force under General Claire L. Chennault, for support mission in Indo-China.[40]

VIETNAM IN THE SECRET SERVICE

In spite of the President's declared aim of not getting involved in the Indo-Chinese question, the Secret Service Agency, viz., the Office of the Strategic Services did establish contact with the nationalist movement. By 1944 Ho Chi Minh had come to know of the American opposition to the French colonial rule. This led him to hope for some support from the United States. The opportunity for this came in late 1944, when Ho established contact with the OSS in Kunming in China. Ho was chosen as one of the 35 agents (he being Agent 19) working in that region and was entrusted with picking up information about Japanese troops in Indo-China. In return Ho succeeded in securing arms and ammunition (six .38 calibre revolvers and 120 rounds of ammunition) from the OSS. Following this, Ho met General Chennault in Kunming in early 1945. The Vietnamese agreed to cooperate with the United States in establishing an underground mission which would help the escape of Allied personnel from Japanese-held territories. The first American unit came in May and with the help of the Viet Minh, it built a small airfield, studied the terrain and discussed military and international problems.

Ho also appealed to Richard Heppwer, Chief of OSS in China, for American help in pressurising France to grant Indo-China independence. When the Japanese surrendered he approached them to wire messages to the Allies requesting the "United Nations to realise their solemn promise" by granting Indo-China "full independence". The Viet Minh had been encouraged in this by the American pledge to grant the Philippines their freedom, and had hoped for cordial relations with the United States in the future. In fact Ho did get some assistance from OSS and other American and allied agencies, both material aid as well as encouragement. According to Robert Shaplen the unofficial encouragement of Ho was even more than the material assistance.[41] According to another source an American officer even helped Giap in "liberating" the city of Thai-Nguyen on 17 August.[42]

Ho also tried other allied sources successfully. He was also supplied with arms by the Air Ground Aid Service (AGAS), an American Army group.

Thus the United States, through the OSS and other units, had helped the Viet Minh against the Japanese.

One cannot, however, exaggerate the role of American aid in liberating Indo-China from the Japanese or in bringing the Viet Minh to power. The American aid was not much in amount and was meant mainly against the Japanese invaders.[43] Nor was the United States committed to Vietnamese independence through these organisations. As a subsequent American Intelligence Chief in the Far East put it, "Ho offered to be our man, and we never grabbed his hand because we coundn't bank roll him."[44] Hence one cannot agree with Chen, in his view of America's "active role" in Vietnam or with that of the French who believed that it was the United States which "made" Ho Chi Minh.[45]

Following the death of President Roosevelt, Vice President Harry S. Truman became the President on 12 April 1945. The change in the presidency not only marked a change in the temper of the Administration, but also began a slow but sure drift in a new direction. The prospects of an end to the war altered the international situation further and contributed to this shift in American policy.

Even before the war in Europe came to a close, the differences between the United States and Soviet Union over the Polish question had indicated the trend for the future. The new Administration had come to realize the need for unity among the Western Powers. The Department of State viewed that in the "best interests of the United States...every effort be made by this Government to assist France, morally as well as physically, to regain her strength and her influence."[46] The United States was also aware of the "unreasonable [French] suspicions of American aims and motives" notably in connexion with Indo-China. The Department of State was convinced of the need to remove this French fear and to treat the latter "on the basis of her potential power and influence rather than on the basis of her present strength."[47]

Hence the new Administration adopted a much more flexible position than the preceding one as regards both the French participation in the Far Eastern war against Japan, as well as the future of Indo-China. Prolonged negotiations ensued between the military authorities of France and the United States. However not much

headway could be made until at last the Japanese surrender on 2 September brought the issue to a close.

As for the future of Indo-China the new Administration formulated a course which was quite different from the concept of trusteeship that Roosevelt had contemplated. As Ellen J. Hammer points out, by the spring of 1945, the American Government had ruled out the possibility of "any drastic interference" with the French position in Indo-China.[48] In a cable to General Patrick J. Hurley, the American Ambassador to China, the State Department outlined the American policy as one which "would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indo-China, except under the French Government." Since this seemed to be "unlikely", the cable went on, it was President Truman's intention "at some appropriate time to ask that the French Government give some positive indication of its intention in regard to the establishment of basic liberties and an increasing measure of self-government in Indo-China..."[49]

The Potsdam decision that Vietnam should be divided along the 16th Parallel and that the north and south portions of this line be occupied by the Chinese and the British, reflected this new line of thinking. Though this decision prevented an immediate return of the French to Indo-China, it also meant discarding of the proposals for an international trusteeship. Referring to this, Joseph Buttinger concludes, "the statesmen gathered at Potsdam had in effect agreed that it was up to the French to decide how they would overcome whatever opposition the Vietnamese or the Chinese might put up against their return to Indo-China."[50]

What were the circumstances that led to a reversal of the Roosevelt line? It may be stated in this connection that Roosevelt's policy towards the French in Indo-China did not find complete favour even among his close associates, both at home and abroad. Even his own Secretary of State, Cordell Hull differed from him. Hull opposed the trusteeship plan for colonies; instead he preferred a pledge by the mother country to grant eventual independence to the dependent peoples. He felt that a trusteeship administration would have great difficulty in ruling so large an area and population in terms of service and money. He advocated, instead, returning Indo-China to France on condition that the latter would restore its own popular institutions in the colony and would treat the colony "properly".[51]

The Departments of War and Navy opposed any American

sponsorship of the trusteeship plan in principle. They were convinced that the United States needed the Japanese islands in the Pacfic for her national defence and opposed their being passed on to the UN Trusteeship. H.L. Stimson, the Secretary for War, viewed it as nothing more than a "magnificent American gesture" to persuade Britain and France to "trustee" India and Indo-China respectively. In his view neither Britain nor France would agree to this, and the whole thing would only lead to a "tremendous row". He also opposed an open discussion of the trusteeship proposal at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, before the end of the war in the Pacific. He was afraid that disagreement over the issue might have an adverse effect on the prosecution of the war in the East.

President Roosevelt also faced opposition from among his Western European Allies, in regard to his advocacy of the trusteeship plan. The President himself, in his letter to Hull, mentioned that while his proposal for trusteeship was "wholeheartedly" supported by Marshal Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, it was opposed by the British Foreign Office. The British were afraid of the effect it might have on their own possessions in the East, and those of the Dutch.[52] The United States found it difficult to induce the European Colonial Powers to adopt the American ideas towards their colonial possessions, while at the same time, the United States due to the need for close co-operation in the war, was not in a position to alienate them in the Orient. The President, while repeatedly proposing his ideas, never at any time pressed the Colonial Powers to give their concurrence to the concept. He was in particular, afraid of displeasing Prime Minister Winston Churchill and once, even cautioned Stalin not to bring up the subject of the need for reforms in India, as it was a "sore subject" with Churchill.[53]

EVALUATION

The Indo-Chinese question dominated President Roosevelt's attention till the end, to the extent of giving it "an importance far out of proportion to its actual position within the scheme of things" and that "his preoccupation amounted almost to a fixation."[54] This was especially true, considering the negligible role that Indo-China played through the World War II. This naturally raises the question, as to what were the possible motivations behind Roosevelt's attitude and proposals.

Was President Roosevelt's opposition to the return of France to Indo-China, and his enthusiasm for the trusteeship proposal

born solely out of his sympathy for the independence movement in Indo-China and the poor condition of the dependent people in that colony ? This naturally raises the question how far was the United States aware of the movement that was going on inside Indo-China against the French authorities. There is no evidence to show that the United States fully grasped the significance of this struggle, its strength and popular support though it was aware of the existence of such a movement. For instance, the United States felt that the French conceding to the various Japanese demands was solely the result of Germany's pressure on the former in Europe, whereas the appeasement of Japan was due to some other reasons. The material condition of Indo-China at this time was too bleak to allow any resistance. Further, the local nationalist movement which the French authorities were confronted with at this time and the fact that the French battalions were sent to put it down had weakened the French resistance to Japan. It is doubtful, whether the United States understood this state of affairs.

It may also be noted in this context, that the American President favoured the neutralization of Indo-China in the earlier period and a trusteeship later, but took no position on self-government, whereas the fight within Indo-China was for complete independence. At no time, did President Roosevelt or any other Government spokesman extend any aid, moral or material, to the national movement for Indo-China's freedom. If the United States rejected the request for aid from the Vichy Government it equally opposed lending any support to the native forces that opposed the French colonial rule in Indo-China.

In fact, according to one source, President Roosevelt asked Chiang Kai-shek at the Cairo Conference whether the latter wanted Indo-China. It was Chiang who declined the offer on the ground that the Indo-Chinese were not Chinese and that they would not assimilate with the Chinese people. Following the Chinese rejection, Roosevelt put forth the trusteeship plan which Chiang supported.[55]

It is doubtful whether the Indo-Chinese would have been enthusiastic, even if the United States had implemented the trusteeship plan. A statement made by Truong Chinh in 1946 confirms this. He wrote, "The Vietnamese people have suffered from Japanese domination since 1940 and they have worthily played their part side by side with the Allies in their struggle against the Japanese. They therefore fully deserve their independence. The Vietnamese people will resolutely oppose the return of the French oppressors as well as the status

of a 'mandated country', because they have already attained their majority."[56] Hence one cannot agree with Lawrence H. Battistini who wrote that the Vietnamese aspirations for freedom were sympathetically understood in Washington.[57] Instead, President Roosevelt was reluctant to get mixed up in any effort towards such a liberation from the Japanese.

It may also be noted that during this period the United States was not very much aware of the nature of the nationalistic movement in Indo-China. The question of communist influence on the Vietnamese nationalists, in spite of their known association with Canton, did not attract any special attention in Washington. According to Joseph Ballantine, a former Director of the Far Eastern Affairs in the Department of State, towards the end of the war there was no person in the State Department who "had any experience that amounted to anything in the Far East."[58] There was also a general criticism of Roosevelt's policy, that he did not understand the implication s of the Russian policy in the Far East, and that he apparently welcomed the expansion of Russia in the Western Pacific. The United States did not also make any deliberate effort to secure the goodwill and allegiance of the future political forces of the region. Hence it cannot be said that it was the communist overtones of the nationalist movement which deterred the United States from extending any appreciable aid to the Vietnamese.

This apparent contradiction in the United States' attitude raises another query. Was there at any time, any suggestion of an American desire to dominate Indo-China, or to use her bases for the American Navy ? The military conversations between the American and French military authorities, in the last phase of the Far Eastern War, give one the impression that the US authorities were keen to fight the Japanese alone. Even when they finally agreed to accept the French divisions under the US Command, it was on the explicit understanding that the French would consider the War as "wholly a U.S. function". When viewed in the light of the War and Navy Departments' opposition to a trusteeship plan, it does look plausible that the American military circles, at least, entertained some such hopes of acquiring bases in Indo-China.

To conclude, Roosevelt's policy towards Indo-China was governed by the exigencies of the war. He probably was sincere in his policy that colonial areas like Indo-China should attain self-government but he took no concrete steps towards hastening that development.

Irritation and disappointment with the French coupled with some concern for subject people led him to enunciate the trusteeship concept but he showed no willingness to push it with any great vigour. As the authors of the *Pentagon Papers* point out, President Roosevelt "never made up his mind whether to support the French desire to reclaim their Indo-China colonies...at the end of the war."[59] The end of the war confronted the new President with a situation that was very different from what Roosevelt had faced. Relations with Metropolitan France became far more important than responding immediately to the demand of Indo-China natives for freedom. The trusteeship plan, evolved in the midst of war, was set aside by Roosevelt's successor.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams, A Political and Military Analysis* London, 1963), p. 26.
2. *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.), vol. 3, 6 July 1940, pp. 12-13.
3. Telegram cited in General Georges Catroux, *Deux actes du drame Indochinois* (Paris, 1959), as quoted by Fall, n. 1, P. 41. William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, however, give the date as 20 June 1940. No record of this conversation between the US Under Secretary of State and the French Ambassador could be traced in the State Department files, though reference to it has been made in many French sources. See William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation 1937-1940* (New York, 1952), p. 598.
4. Cordell Hull,*Memoirs* (London, 1948) vol. 1, p. 906.
5. Fall, n. 1, p. 42.
6. Ibid., p. 43.
7. Cordell Hull in a Press Conference on 23 September 1940. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan 1931-1941* (Washington D. C., 1943), vol. 2, p. 297. This will be cited hereafter as *Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941.*
8. For details of the Agreement and related European developments, and the American reaction to them, see William Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (New York, 1947), pp. 92-97.
9. Cordell Hull to Mathews, ibid., p. 97.
10. Ibid., p. 78.
11. F.C. Jones, especially, holds the view that it was the inflexible attitude which the United States took towards this Japanese invasion, that was responsible for the failure of Hull-Nomura talks in Washington. He also felt, the US refusal to make any compromise made Japan attack Pearl

Harbor on 7 December 1941. F.C. Jones, *Japan's New Order in East Asia 1937-45* (London, 1954).

12. As quoted in Andrew Roth, *Japan Strikes South* (New York, 1941), p. 73.
13. William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York, 1950), p. 44.
14. One comes across frequent references to this view in the "Diaries of William D. Leahy" (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington).
15. For the text of the Executive Order issued by the President on 26 July 1941, see *Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941*, pp. 266-7. Doubts have been expressed by various writers both as regards the effectiveness of this step, as also the purpose behind it. Both Jones and Ambassador Grew have noted clearly, that the Japanese action did not come to the United States as a surprise. Grew viewed that an earlier warning to Japan of the possible economic sanctions, consequent to her invasion, would have prevented any such invasion by Japan. This casts doubt, incidentally, on the sincerity of Roosevelt's proposal to Japan for a settlement of the Indo-Chinese issue. On the other hand, Jones writes that Roosevelt was warned even on 19 July, by the War Plans Division of the Navy Department, that such an embargo would precipitate war. According to Jones, the purpose of the embargo was more to provoke Japan, than to the settle Indo-China problem. Jones, n. 11, pp. 263-4; Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era; A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years 1904-1945* (London, 1953), vol. 2, pp. 1347-8.
16. Frank C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 33.
17. F.C. Jones, however, does not seem to hold this view. He argues, that Japan was even ready to withdraw from Indo-China, if that could lead to an agreement with the United States. He felt that Japan was keen to keep away from the Indo-Chinese scene. Jones, n. 11.
18. *Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941*, p. 529.
19. Fall, n. 1, p. 46.
20. Reference to this can be found in the Official Papers of Henry L. Stimson, 1940-1945 (Stimson Collection, Historical Manuscript Archives, Yale University, New Haven).
21. *Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941*, p. 529.
22. Ibid., p. 529.
23. Leahy, n. 13, p. 58.
24. Hull, n. 4, vol. 2, p. 1595.
25. Fall, n. 1, p. 50.
26. Hull, n. 4, vol. 2, p. 1597.
27. In a speech on 21 October 1944 : Leland M. Goodrich, and Maries J. Caroll, eds, *Documents on American Foreign Relations, July 1944—June 1945* (Boston, 1947), vol. 7, p. 4.
28. Hull, n. 4, vol. 2, p. 1595.
29. Robert E. Sherwood, *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins* (London, 1949), vol. 2, p. 772.
30. Ibid., p. 818.
31. Ibid., p. 716.
32. Joseph W. Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers* (New York, 1948), p. 246.

33. In a meeting with Marshal Josef Stalin on February 1945 : Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Malta and Yalta 1945* (Washington, 1955), p. 770. This reference will be cited hereafter as, *Foreign Relations, Malta and Yalta 1945.*
34. As recalled by Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer; Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports* (New York, 1958), p. 340.
35. Hull, n. 4, vol. 2, p. 1598.
36. President Roosevelt mentioned this request from de Gaulle in his conversations with Stalin at Yalta on 8 February 1945. *Foreign Relations, Malta and Yalta, 1945*, p. 770.
37. Leahy, n. 13, p. 336.
38. Memorandum, Stettinius to Forrestal, 11 January 1945; as quoted in, Office of the Chief Military History Department of the Army, *United States Army in World War II, Special Studies, Rearming the French* (Washington, D. C. 1957), p. 394. This source gives a detailed account of the various French offers and United States replies to them. Ibid., pp. 391-9.
39. Ibid., p. 395. Leahy too confirms this order.
40. General Claire L. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter* (New York, 1949), p. 342 General Wedemeyer too, who was then Commanding General of the China Theatre and who issued the orders to General Chennault, refers to the President's rigid stand of not giving any supplies to the French forces. Wedemeyer, n. 34, pp. 340 and 343. William Leahy too confirms this. Leahy, n. 13. p. 338.
41. Robert Shaplen. *The Lost Revolution* (London, 1966), pp. 33-34.
42. As cited by Chen, *Viet Nam and China, 1938-1954* (Princeton, 1969), p. 107.
43. Gallagher Papers, as quoted in Special Operations Research Office, *Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare : Vietnam 1941-1954* (Washington, D. C., 1964), pp. 106-7.
44. As cited by Shaplen, n. 41, p. 34.
45. Chen, n. 42, pp. 113-14.
46. In a report to President Truman on 13 April 1945; as cited in Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs : Year of Decision* (New York, 1955), vol. 1, p. 15.
47. Ibid.
48. Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indo-China* (Stanford, California, 1954), p. 42.
49. U. S., Senate; 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Armed Services and Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, *Military Situation in the Far East* (Washington, D. C., 1951), vol. 4, p. 2892.
50. Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam : A Dragon Embattled* (New York, 1967), vol. 1, p. 310.
51. Hull, n. 4, vol. 2, pp. 1598-9.
52. Ibid., p. 1597.
53. Sherwood, n. 29. The President also referred to this British disapproval in his conversations with Stalin at Yalta. *Foreign Relations, Malta and Yalta, 1945*, p. 770.
54. Fall, n. 1, p. 58.
55. Samuel I. Rosenman, comp., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1944-45* (New York, 1950), p. 562.
56. Truong Chinh, *Primer for Revolt* (New York, 1963), pp. 50-51.

57. Lawrence H. Battistini, *The United States and Asia* (London, 1956), p. 297.
58. "The Reminiscences of Joseph Ballantine": Interviews by Mrs. Beate Gordon, 1961 (Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York), vol. 2, pp. 59-60 and 86.
59. New York Times, *The Pentagon Papers* (New York, 1971), p. 7.

III

Shadow Of The Giant

One of the important consequences of the Second World War was the emergence of the United States militarily and economically as the most powerful nation in the world. Isolationism and traditional notions of neutrality ceased to be significant factors in the national consciousness. Unlike the years that followed the Great War of 1914-18, the post-Second World War period witnessed the United States undertaking newer and vastly greater commitments. This was a logical extension of the active role which it played in military operations and in the various conferences held during the course of the War on the post-War reconstruction and reorganization of the world. These vastly increased activities of the United States involved it in the concerns of both Europe and Asia, though not to the same extent in each case.

The United States has had its interests in the East for over a century. However, its interests and activities had been mainly confined to the three East Asian countries of Japan, China and Korea. Its interests in the region of South-East Asia were very marginal and indirect. Even this marginal interest was mainly due to the role

small South-East Asian nations were assigned to in the strategic calculations of an aggressive Japan, and was born as a result of the exigencies of the war in the East. Its involvement in the problems of South-East Asia in the post-War years was slow and gradual, and was brought about by many intra-regional and external events which changed the power position in this remote part of the world.

The Second World War, when it ended, had left its deep impression on Asia, and the "Sleeping Orient" had woken up to find itself in a period of seemingly unending turmoil and bloodshed. Nationalism had asserted itself as the most potent force and the western colonial Powers were faced with a direct challenge to their power and possessions. The map of Asia changed quickly and considerably. Several new States made their appearance and in a number of other countries struggles for independence attained increased momentum. A confused and complex situation had emerged and the United States was not adequately prepared to respond to it effectively. There was also a changed power position in the East. During the War Japan had been the principal antagonist of the United States in Asia, and China, its closest ally. The American leaders had hoped that after the defeat of Japan, China ruled by a regime friendly to the United States would become a stable and leading power in the Far East. The post-War developments in China, however, belied all these hopes, thus necessitating a radical revision in its policies. While the communist take-over of China in 1949 lent some clarity to the confused Chinese scene, it had reversed the American picture of the emergent Asia. The United States was faced with the task of finding an alternate ally in Asia.

In the year 1945 Asia was still a dark continent to most of the general public in America. The policies of the Truman Administration were also, during the immediate post-war years, Europe-oriented. The problem of Germany, the question of the recovery and reconstruction of a war-devastated Europe, the formation of a stable peace-time alliance with the countries of western Europe, were some of the European problems which had preoccupied its attention. The US policy-makers paid more attention to Europe, because of racial and cultural affinity and the conviction that Europe was the first line of defence of the United States. As far as the problems of Asia, more especially South-East Asia, were concerned, the United States was not ready or willing to play any active role. It was also reluctant to embark on a course that might be regarded as interference in the affair of the possessions

of the Western colonial powers, which happened to be its closest allies in Europe and whose moral and political support it needed in its disputes with the Soviet Union.

The most burning question of Asia, however, was the very issue of freedom from colonial rule. The American attitude towards colonialism at this time appeared to many Asian nationalists as one of indifference and non-commitment. The US Administration seemed to have entertained the view that the Colonial Powers would be able to adjust their policies to the new pressures and to decide on the timing, method and extent of such adjustments. It kept its hands off the matter, as a problem to be settled between the colonialist "mother-country" and the "native" inhabitants, and refused to go beyond urging the parties concerned to settle the future of these colonies speedily and by peaceful rather than forceful means.

To many Asian nationalists it looked as though the American response to colonialism in Asia during this period did not live up to the oft-repeated claims of the State Department that the United States was in favour of an early fulfilment of the aspirations of non-self-governing peoples.[1] President Harry S. Truman, in a Navy Day Address on 27 October 1945, stated that the United States believed that "all peoples who are prepared for self-government should be permitted to choose their own form of government by their own freely expressed choice, without interference from any foreign source."[2] He also said on another occasion that the process of colonial peoples moving towards independence was something that the Americans could understand and sympathize with, since it paralleled their own struggle for independence. He even offered American guidance and help whenever possible.[3] However, in actual reality, the President did not follow up with any significant measures to hasten the process of decolonization.

The United States' policy of non-involvement in the colonial issue was criticized both at home and abroad. It was felt that the United States as a leading power should use its influence to bring about a better state of affairs for the colonial people, rather than just voicing pious hopes. The US Administration was criticized for its preoccupation with Europe and neglect of Asia. While it was pouring a large amount of money into western Europe by way of the Marshall Plan and European Recovery Programme, with a view to strengthening the region against a Russian expansion, its contribution to a similar recovery of Asian countries from the unsettled economic conditions was practically nil. Nor did the United States concern itself with the deteriorating

health situation in the Far East. Referring to this, the *New York Times* editorial pleaded for greater interest of Americans in this area.[4]

Such a policy of ignoring Asia, with the possible exception of China, was also criticized as being suicidal to American aims and policies in Europe. The US Administration was warned against the danger of communist penetration in Asia. The Marshall Plan while successfully containing communism in Europe might lead to these forces being diverted to Asia. It was a policy, pointed out Edgar Ansel Mowrer, of direct pressure in one area with all the concentrated peace-time strength of the mighty America and that it did not attempt to contain Russia in Asia.[5] The *New York Times* warned that unless the United States attempted to break the stalemate in the Far East and help in the solution of the problems of the area, it might lose the cold war in Asia by default.[6] The National Foreign Trade Council too, pleaded for "an aggressively administered Far Eastern policy, long range and definite in nature, involving aid and assistance."[7]

Senators Robert A. Taft (Republican, Ohio), George W. Malone (Republican, Nevada) and Walter H. Judd (Republican, Minnesota) were among those who criticized the Administration for "ignoring Asia". Representative Jacob Javits (Republican, New York) called for "an immediate, vigorous and affirmative" programme in Asia.[8]

The indifferent attitude of the American policy-makers disappointed the Asian opinion too, which had looked forward to vigorous and positive assistance from America to solve their problems. The *Hindu* of Madras (India) pleaded strongly for "active intervention in Asia." It declared that mere expression of American good-will and sympathy for Asia or for the Asians who were fighting for freedom would not satisfy them.[9] The American reluctance to extend economic aid to Asia (excepting a small amount to China) also came in for criticism. *The Eastern Economist* of New Delhi wondered whether there was no appreciation among US policy-makers of American strategic interest in Asia. The journal was of the opinion that US aid would help in stabilizing the conditions in Asia.[10]

Even the Western colonial Powers like Britain, France and the Netherlands, were, for their own reasons, disappointed by the non-committal American attitude. In response to the feelers sent by these countries for the formation of a regional economic organisation consisting of the French, British and Dutch territories in Asia, the United States contented itself with the response that it had no objection to such a scheme. It did not volunteer to lend any active aid or

assume any other commitment to this area. This discouraged the Western European Powers which believed that the American power and its influence in Asia would be necessary to make such a plan a success.[11]

This complete indifference and non-committal attitude towards South-East Asia in the post-war years could be partly attributed to the changes of personnel in the key policy making posts. Neither President Truman nor his first two Secretaries of State, Edward R. Stettinius and James F. Byrnes, were familiar with or specially interested in South-East Asia's problems as the previous President or his Secretary of State Hull were. Even Secretary George C. Marshall, who had some knowledge of conditions in China, relegated South-East Asia to secondary consideration. American policy-makers gave primary importance to tackling the problems of Europe and in Asia they gave some attention to the crisis in China. Not much thought was given to the implication for South-East Asia of the possible establishment of a strong centralized communist regime in China and the emergence of communist regimes in other places.

The American attitude during this period to the question of the future of Vietnam, fitted into this general outlook towards Asia. In the period following the war, the cases of Indo-China and Indonesia posed a challenge to American views on freedom and self-determination.

Though the United States itself stood by its earlier promise and granted independence to its Asian possession, the Philippines soon after the War, there was an obvious reluctance on its part to persuade its Western Allies to take a similar course. Its anxiety not to annoy or intervene in the policies and possessions of the Western Allies and the tendency to keep itself uninvolved in the troubled Asian situation were reflected in its policy towards French Indo-China. The Truman Administration was apprehensive of committing itself to an anti-colonial policy in this region, because of its commitments to France and its interest in French co-operation for a European security system.

However in the Department of State there were differences regarding the American approach to the Vietnam issue. Some who were cognizant of Asian affairs advocated a decisive American stand in favour of an interim trusteeship for Indo-China. On the

other hand, there were some who wanted to preserve the *status quo* and a hands-off policy towards the European colonial areas in Asia in order to avoid offending the respective European governments. The "Europe-first" voices in the State Department prevailed at this time and the earlier proposals about the future of Vietnam were shelved.

On 2 September 1945, following the Japanese withdrawal from Indo-China, the Viet Minh declared independence of Vietnam. The United States neither encouraged nor discouraged the nationalists in their course. When three weeks later, the French returned to the southern half of Vietnam and with the help of the occupying British forces under General Gracey, soon overthrew the Vietnamese regime, the American Government once again was silent and acquiescent. It chose to follow the line of least resistance and announced that it recognized French sovereignty. John Carter Vincent, Director of the Office of the Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State, declared on 20 October 1945, that the United States did not question French sovereignty in Vietnam. He only expressed the hope that an early agreement would be reached between the representatives of the French Government and the Annamese. The farthest that the United States was ready to go was to lend its assistance, if requested, in reaching such peaceful agreements.[12] The American hope seemed to have been based on its assumption that the European colonial powers and the Asian nationalists would themselves work out a suitable and peaceful arrangement for self-government and independence. Oliver E. Clubb, Jr., also talks of the belief of the Department of State which viewed that it was desirable to restore French colonial rule over Indo-China.[13] Such a view of the State Department was based on the assumption that the French were capable of restoring their control over Indo-China. The American point of view was well expressed by a cablegram sent by the Secretary of State George C. Marshall to the American Embassy in Paris. It said, "We have fully recognised France's sovereign position and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavouring to undermine that position. At the same time we cannot shut our eyes to the fact there are two sides [sic] this problem and that our reports indicate both lack of French understanding other side and continued existence [sic] dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and method in areas.

"On the other hand we do not lose sight [sic] fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct communist connections and it should be obvious

that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by the philosophy and political organization directed from and controlled by the Kremlin."

"Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest."[14]

Nor did the war in Vietnam, in the years 1946 and 1947, evoke much of a response from the American authorities. It was during this time that the United Nations was discussing, rather heatedly, the question of Indonesian independence and that issue overshadowed the war in Vietnam. The United States, especially, did not feel impelled to take any interest in Indo-China even as much as in Indonesia. It made no effort to bring the Vietnamese question to the UN forum, nor offer itself as a mediator between the French and the nationalist forces, at a time when the Vietnamese question looked more amenable to a settlement than any other problem in this area. The Vietnamese were willing to go farther than any other nationalist group, Burmese or Indonesian for instance, in making concessions to the colonial power. By the March 1946 Agreement, Ho Chi Minh had even granted to the French military, political and economic concessions on a substantial scale. The Vietnamese had also looked forward to the United States for support and would have, perhaps, accepted its mediation. The Vietnamese provided another opportunity too for action towards a settlement through UN intervention. Ho Chi Minh had appealed more than once to the United Nations, to take up the case of Vietnam and settle it by peaceful means.[15] He even offered an open-door policy and sea and air bases in Vietnam, if only the Big Five would intervene and settle the issue.[16] The United States, as also the other members of the United Nations, ignored these appeals.

Instead the United States, in the initial period, confined itself to expressing its concern over the bloodshed and wishing for a speedy end to the war in Indo-China, through a "pacific basis of adjustment".[17] It, however, tried to convey to France its view that the maintenance of 120,000 French troops in Indo-China in an effort to maintain its sovereignty was a "wasteful, maladroit policy". It would adversely affect the economy of France and hamper Western European defence. A demonstration of the weakness of the occidental armies against the oriental guerillas would undermine Western prestige in South-East Asia, it was argued. On these grounds the United States tried to suggest to France that a prolongation of the conflict in Vietnam would be undesirable. It maintained during the period, a

neutral position in this colonial war. For instance, the United States promptly denied a Vietnamese broadcast which construed the visit of an American consul to the Viet Minh quarters, as an indication of support to the Vietnamese cause.[18]

The reasons for this American indifference were not far to seek. Indo-China did not at that time rate high in the strategic calculations of American policy-makers. Nor did the United States or Great Britain have any substantial investment in Indo-China, as they had in Indonesia. The American leaders also had to take note of the possible effects of any stand, that they might adopt, on the political alignments in France. They were, perhaps, fearful that even a strong American criticism of the French policy, might bring down the present socialist government in France and bring to power an extremist government, either Right or Left.[19] Hence as the Pentagon Papers pointed out the American policy remained "ambivalent".

The American policy of non-involvement was criticized by various sections of American public opinion. Some Republican Senators agreed with the Asian nationalists and criticized the American attitude as one that supported the Western European colonial regimes. Senator George W. Malone (Republican, Nevada) said that the US aid given to France, through the Marshall Plan and the European Recovery Program (ERP) was helping the latter in holding down the nationalist movement in Indo-China. Its help in re-establishing the tottering empires would send the people to the Communist army, if that was the only one to fight for freedom.[20] Senator Wayne Morse (Democrat, Oregon) who expressed a similar view warned that the United States should not destroy the independence movements in the East in its endeavour to destroy communism[21].

The American policy to offer military aid to its Western European Allies under the North Atlantic Pact also came under fire. Senator Willian E. Jenner (Republican, Indiana) felt the American commitment to help France and other colonial Powers to reimpose their rule in Asian colonies would help to spread the "Communist plague" even more rapidly. It would also lead to a continuous "blackmailing" of the United States by the European associates to use the threat of communism in their colonial possessions.[22] Senator Walter F. George (Democrat, Georgia) too viewed, the United States by ratifying the Altantic Pact might be committed to give aid to the Pact members, who had "colonial troubles".[23] These and other Congressmen pointed out the dangers inherent in a victory of Chinese

communism, and the threat it posed to other countries in the region. They urged for a positive China policy which would shield the area from the spread of communism. Senator Malone, on the other hand, felt the United States was being pushed around by the European Powers to preserve the Asian markets and sources of raw materials for themselves. If the United States had to protect these areas for the Empire-minded nations, he said, it should at least ask for equal access to the markets of these areas and the privilege for these colonies to deal with the United States on an even basis.[24]

However, one notices in these opinions of the Congressmen, the absence of any positive suggestion to put an end to it. This becomes all the more significant, as one notices the frequent references to the Indonesian question and the interest the latter evoked among the Congressmen. Sumner Welles, former Under-Secretary of State, however, warned that the Vietnamese revolt marked "the beginning of a period of anarchy". He thought that the United States, as the only power with no stakes involved in this war, could assume leadership without evoking any suspicion of its motives. He warned rather prophetically, that unless the United States took the initiative and offered a constructive solution to the problem of the dependent peoples, the revolt in Indo-China might rapidly reach proportions which even organized international action would not be able to control.[25] Major-General Patrick J. Hurley, who resigned from the post of Ambassador to China, accused the American diplomacy as one which supported colonialism as against communism, instead of putting its weight behind the UN Charter. He attributed the "American failure" in Asia, to its support to the imperialist bloc. He found the reason for this attitude in the "weakness and opposition of the United States Foreign Service."[26]

The American public too had, in general, little awareness of the implications of the French attempt to re-establish its colonial regime in Indo-China. Some small groups of Americans, mainly left wing elements, and some liberal organizations like Vietnam-American Friendship Association, and Committee for the Celebration of Viet Nam Independence tried to win support for the nationalist cause among the American public and sought UN support for the cause of Vietnamese independence. They also pleaded for an end to the American aid to France, as they were convinced it would be used against the Vietnamese. W.E.B. Du Bois, a well-known Negro leader and the Vice-Chairman, Council on African Affairs, for instance,

described the American Military Assistance Program to Europe as one "not so much to protect Western Europe from the east, as to enable it to put down colonial unrest among 250,000,000 colonial peoples".[27]

Far more significant than the activities of the liberal and left-wing groups was the fact that some sections of the American Press too vigorously supported the Vietnameses struggle and pleaded for US action. The *New York Times* gave a comprehensive coverage to the developments inside Indo-China and consistently supported the cause of independence. It blamed the French as being responsible for a colonial war and strongly condemned the French attempt to retain its grip in the Far East by force. The newspaper said that the French were disregarding history in trying to hold Indo-China and its population of twenty-five million by force. The French, it argued, would lose the war both because of their own weak military and economic position, as also due to the internal differences among the political parties of France. It also recognized the weakness and unpopularity of the French authority within Vietnam as also of the regime the latter had set up.

The *New York Times* did not regard the Vietnamese nationalists as a Communist group. It did not agree with the French view that Ho Chi Minh was wholly a communist, though he was a Comintern agent years ago. The Viet Minh was "a real national movement supported by people who know no more of communism than they do of democracy, but who intend to have their freedom", *The Times* wrote.[28]

The newspaper pleaded for a speedy end to the war and a settlement to be reached by negotiations, as it was causing a huge economic drain both to the French and to the Vietnamese. It said the Vietnamese had lost their confidence in the French that the latter would be in a position to offer any technical aid to the Vietnamese. It reported that the Vietnamese admired most the United States and pleaded for a speedy action on the part of the United States. The newspaper recognized that the American arms and loans were instrumental in giving Indo-China back to France and in helping the latter to hold on to its eastern possessions. While not asking for a stoppage of this aid, the paper referred to the US reluctance to assume any responsibility for Indo-China either through the United Nations or outside it. It pleaded for a quick decision on the part of the United States. The *New York Times* also warned, whenever the

United States compromised with the principle of self-determination as inscribed in the Atlantic Charter, it failed to live up to its heritage and was weakening itself to that extent. Edgar Ansel Mowrer wrote the United States, because of its "real and urgent" interests in Europe, chose to be indifferent to the Asiatic nationalist aspirations. This failure to stand firmly on the principle of full and rapid emancipation shook their faith in the United States.[29]

The *New York Herald Tribune* too opposed the French attempt to re-establish themselves in Indo-China. It viewed the French motive as one of trying to exploit the colony by dividing it and bringing about an internal conflict. It had little doubt the French attempt would end in a failure.[30] The well-known columnist Walter Lippmann pleaded for support to the independence movement in Asia.

Columnist Samuel Grafton of *New York Post* observed that the wavering and indecisive policy of the United States towards colonial problems led to the successes of the Russians who could pose as the conscience of mankind.[31] The *Atlantic Monthly* expressed a similar view and felt that the US Government was acting in the "most conservative" fashion and was responsible for "slowing down the rate of change."[32]

It was also felt that if the United States wanted to maintain its prestige in Asia, it would be done here and now by lending its weight for freedom and self-government. This might also have averted the future bloodshed and the unenviable role which the United States was called upon to play in Indo-China. The *New Republic*, a relatively progressive journal, too advocated a similar action by the United States towards a UN intervention and mediation in the Indo-Chinese dispute.[33] It criticized the American stand in this dispute as one which sought to maintain the *status quo*, and warned that such a "referee attitude" to the yearning of the Eastern people would make the latter believe that the Soviet Union was a better friend than the United States.[34]

Harold R. Issacs, the staff correspondent of *Newsweek* believed that the Vietnamese communists were essentially nationalists and stood isolated from the Russian and French communists. They hoped that the United States would be able and willing to support them politically and materially.[35] Walter H. Briggs, a free lance reporter writing frequently in the *New Republic* held a similar view. He advocated strong measures by the United States to help the Vietnamese attain economic security and political independence.[36]

The Progressive Party led by Henry Wallace and the Socialist Party referred in their election platforms of 1948 to the issue of colonialism. However, it was only the Progressive Party which specifically referred to the struggles for independence in many Asian countries. It affirmed that world peace and prosperity would not be attained unless those people won their freedom. It urged the United States to co-operate with the other countries inside the United Nations in order to get the colonial system abolished.[37]

This was indeed a very propitious opportunity for the United States to help bring about a solution. The United States was the only Western Power which enjoyed any prestige and goodwill among the Asian nationalists. Even the Vietnamese looked forward to its support and sympathy.

In fact up to 1946, the Viet Minh's goodwill towards the United States was unquestioned. As one report put it, Ho and his men had "unrestrained affection for all Americans".[38] He even evinced considerable interest in the language of the American Declaration of Independence which he incorporated in the declaration of Vietnamese independence proclaimed on 2 September 1945. On the same day Vo Nguyen Giap, Interior Minister and Chief of the Viet Minh army too issued a statement in which he declared "The United States of America...has paid the greatest contribution to the Vietnamese against fascist Japan, our enemy, and so the Great American Republic is a good friend of ours." [39] The documents in the Pentagon Papers confirm this. They reveal that between October 1945 and February 1946, Ho Chi Minh had written at least eight letters to President Truman and the Secretary of State appealing for American mediation. None of these appeals were answered. Ho Chi Minh even sent a request to President Truman through the O.S.S. that Vietnamese be "accorded" the same status as the Philippines' for a period of tutelage pending independence."[40]

In the background of such hopes the Viet Minh interpreted the presence of the American officers at their functions following their capture of power, and the flying of the American flag over the American residences and buildings in Hanoi, as proof of American support and backing. Not merely the Vietnamese but even the French mistook this to mean that the United States had established "official relations" with the Viet Minh regime. Even the resemblance between the flags of Viet Minh and the American bombers made the people believe that the American bombers and fighters were part of

the mighty Vietnamese air force.[41] Ellen J. Hammer, in her book relates another similar incident. On 2 September 1945 when the Vietnamese took out a procession celebrating the independence, two American plares with their white star insignia flew low over the demonstrators. This gave the appearance of American support for the Viet Minh leaders.[42] The Vietnamese too interpreted it as such. The Vietnamese leaders had also looked forward for the American blessings over the inauguration of an independent Vietnam in September 1945, and the subsequent help from the United States. The reported American opposition in the Potsdam Conference of August 1945 to return Indo-China to French rule, following the Japanese surrender, had not only earned the gratitude of the Vietnamese, but confirmed their belief that more American support would be forthcoming.

The Viet Minh were further encouraged in their hopes by the visit of at least three American groups to Hanoi in August and September. An OSS visit led by Major Archimedes L. Patti came in late August. Major Patti, with the permission of General Wedemeyer took Jean Sainteny the French Representative for Northern Vietnam, to Hanoi and helped the latter to meet Giap. So too, in September, Gen. Philip E. Gallagher arrived in Vietnam, as the head of the American Military Mission. General Gallagher even served as a mediator in the Franco-Chinese dispute over the Bank of Indo-China. His success as a mediator was mainly due to his amicable relations with Ho Chi Minh. Following Gallagher, another group led by Colonel Nordlinger arrived; it occupied itself with the needs of prisoners of war. Around this time, a Vietnamese-American Friendship Association was founded in Hanoi. General Gallagher and his officers attended its first meeting. These American activities in Vietnam led even Ho to believe that the United States would sympathise and extend support to the cause of Vietnamese independence.

It took some time for the Vietnamese nationalists to become aware of the changing attitude of the United States and realise that the Americans were unlikey to be very helpful.

The United States was thus in a position to influence the French action had it made its aid to France conditional on the grant of independence to Vietnam. The fluid situation in Indo-China in the beginning of 1946, and the time-gap between the Japanese withdrawal and the re-assertion of French authority, did offer a breathing space, when the United States could have arrived at a definitive policy of

supporting either the old colonial regime or the nationalist movement. The United States Government was perhaps advised against any immediate action by the report of two State Department officers, Messrs. Moffat and Landon. They met Ho many times in late 1946 and were impressed by him as a person, but apparently they recommended against any American support for his regime.[43] As the authors of the *Pentagon Papers* point out "Non-intervention by the United States on behalf of the Vietnamese was tantamount to acceptance of the French."[44] In the end, the vague and indefinite attitude of the United States to the nationalist struggle and its pre-occupation with Europe only led it into greater and greater complications resulting in direct large scale involvement.

The American attitude to Indo-China disappointed all those nations which were interested in the future of Indo-China, though for different reasons. The Vietnamese nationalists were offended by what they regarded as the callous indifference and neutral attitude of the Americans to the most vital question of freedom from colonial rule. Other Asians who had looked forward to the US intervening effectively on the side of peoples struggling for freedom, were also disappointed. On the other hand, the French already distrustful of the United States, were equally dissatisfied with the American attitude to Indo-China as lacking in understanding and support for the French point of view.

French distrust of the Americans was born even before the Sēcond World War was over and France was liberated. President de Gaulle had personified this by refusing to permit the hungry French to be fed by the US Army or even UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. The French were distrustful of American power, and of the economic and political ends for which it might be used. This French fear of American power and of the possible obligations that American economic aid might entail France, was even more intense in respect of the colonial issue. The French fear of American intentions towards its colonies was only confirmed and strengthened by the "ambiguous and dual role" which the United States played towards the French in Indo-China during and after the war years. The criticism of President Roosevelt regarding the French rule in Indo-China, his proposal for a trusteeship for Indo-China, his rejection of the repeated French offers for participating in the war against Japan, had deeply disturbed the French Right. The French blamed the United States and more especially Lt.-Gen. A.C. Wedemeyer for

the division of Indo-China along the 15th Parallel and for arranging for the British and Chinese occupation south and north of this line of division. The French thought it was the American refusal to allow the British occupation of entire Indo-China, that was responsible for the emergence of Ho Chi Minh. They tended to believe that it was Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek who set up Ho Chi Minh as the head of the Government. Thus, the French argued that the United States inadvertently played a part in the events that led to the present acute problem of Indo-China.

The French also viewed with suspicion the sympathy of the OSS agents to Ho Chi Minh and the supply of American equipment from the Philippines, Thailand and China to the Viet Minh in the latter's resistance to the Japanese. The French began to question the nature and motives of the US policy in keeping itself aloof from the developments in Indo-China following the Japanese withdrawal. Many Frenchmen were obsessed by the bogey of American business infiltration into Indo-China and of American strategic designs on the country. To them, the OSS was the vanguard of a new imperialism. The liberal French newspaper *Le Monde* reported an alleged OSS offer to Ho Chi Minh that the economic interests with which General William Donovan, the OSS chief was associated, would help reconstruct railroads, roads and airfields in exchange for economic privileges in the region and that Ho rejected the offer.[45] An article by J.R. Tournoux in the French paper *Liberation* expressed similar fear. "The United States asks that it participate in the industrialisation of our overseas territories, that is, the opening of our empire to American capital and merchandise a participation that risks becoming preponderant," it said.[46] Hence, the French interpreted the American opposition to their re-entry into Indo-China, as one born out of selfish American designs in respect of Indo-China. The French also systematically tried to counteract the pro-American sentiment among the Vietnamese. They started thinly-veiled newspaper sniping at the American Consulate and the activities of the USIS. They also tried to spread an anti-American feeling by circulating the rumour that "America wanted to take over Indo-China".

Once they got themselves entrenched in Saigon with the help of the British Commander, the French were anxious not to allow any outside intervention, even of its own European allies. The French also started to picture the struggle in Indo-China and the resistance of the Vietnamese to their reoccupation as a "Civil War". Towards

this end, they began their efforts to set up a regime which, while being indigenous, would not oppose the French domination. The French, thus, insisted that the conflict was a domestic matter and hence resisted any suggestion of the UN intervention or American initiative.

Though the French were opposed to any outside intervention, they were still very eager to get outside aid. The outbreak of the war with Viet Minh put additional strain on the already weak finances of a war-devastated France. The French Government had perforce to turn to the United States for this help. France also needed military equipment for which it depended on aid from abroad. Hence the French had to justify their colonial rule to the world public opinion and more especially to the American press and public. The French tried to picture the conflict in Indo-China as an ideological war and as part of the war which the United States was waging in Europe against communism. The political background and ideological leanings of Ho Chi Minh and a few of his colleagues were cited in support of the French argument.

The French also depicted Ho Chi Minh as a Japanese stooge, who had been assisted in the past by 2,000 Japanese instructors and who had obtained modern American arms and equipment from the Chinese.[47] At the same time they also proclaimed that Ho Chi Minh's government was a 'front' for the communists in Asia. They spoke of the Viet Minh as a totalitarian rule, marked by concentration camps, and political assassinations. The French argued that American opposition to the French return to Indo-China was due to their ignorance of the true nature of the Viet Minh and of the French policy in Indo-China. They affirmed that their policy was similar to the American policy in the Philippines and not one of the old-fashioned colonialism.

The enunciation of the Truman Doctrine on 12 March, 1947 increased the French hopes of a change in America's stance regarding Indo-China. They contended that France was serving the interests of the "Free World" in Asia and was trying to establish a politically stable and economically productive group of States in Southern Asia, on the edge of the disturbed and divided China. As such they deserved American sympathy and support in their effort of putting an end to the resistance.

The French effort to depict Ho as an unsavoury communist did not seem to carry much conviction with the American public in the

initial stages. Robert Trumbull, the *The New York Times* correspondent reported that the nationalist movement in Vietnam dated even before communism,[48] and that only 10 to 20 per cent among the rank and file were communists.[49] However, as the cold war tensions mounted, the situation began to change slowly, especially as the American Government became involved in erecting a defence alliance in Western Europe, with France playing a pivotal role. When the French Government took steps to set up a Vietnamese regime under Bao Dai with the purpose of drawing the nationalists away from the Viet Minh, the United States made it known to Bao Dai that American support would be more readily available to a non-communist nationalist regime.[50] This offer had the effect, to some extent, of making both the French Government and Bao Dai work towards a settlement more earnestly than before. The years 1948 and 1949 witnessed more and more paper concessions by the French, till at last on 8 March 1949 the Elysee Accords by which Bao Dai became the Head of the State of Vietnam, were reached.

The Elysee Accords failed to capture popular support and were criticized within Indo-China as one which agreed to too many concessions to the French. The United States, however, hailed it as a development that would "serve to hasten the re-establishment of peace in that country and the attainment of Vietnam's rightful place in the family of nations".[51] It hoped that the Agreement would "form the basis for the progressive realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people". The enthusiastic welcome accorded to the Elysee Agreement by the US Administration could be attributed, to some extent, to the fear created by the communist successes inside China, and the arrival of the victorious communist Chinese forces along the northern borders of Tongking. The United States viewed, a Vietnamese government however impotent, would be able to compete with the Viet Minh for the loyalty of the Vietnamese population better than the French government, and could act as a barrier against the communist onslaught. The Pentagon study, however believes that even in March 1949, the Truman Administration hesitated to extend complete backing to Bao Dai as it considered him to be still weak. In a cablegram to the Paris embassy, the State Department described its thinking on this issue : "We cannot at this time irretrievably commit the U.S. to the support of a native government which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually a puppet government separated from the people and existing only by the presence of French military force.[52]

IMPACT AT CHINESE MARCH

The Revolution in China which brought the world's most populous country under the rule of a communist regime, was one of the most important developments in post-War Asia. China had been the focal point of American policy in Asia in the first half of the twentieth century. The United States had gradually got itself involved in the domestic politics of China. By the time the Second World War was over the United States had become the guardian and protector of the Nationalist China externally as well as internally. The efforts of the United States to stall the fall of the Nationalist regime failed. In 1947 civil war broke out, culminating eventually in the declaration of a People's Republic of China by the communists on 21 September 1949.

The communist success in China which touched off a serious controversy within the United States, was a major defeat for the Asian policy of the United States and reversal of its expectations and assumptions in this part of the world. It marked a turning point in the American policy not only towards China but towards South and Southeast Asia as well.

The communist gain in China threatened the whole basis of American security in the Pacific and thus necessitated a reappraisal of its existing arrangements. An immediate change came with the substitution of Southeast Asia and Japan for the position earlier reserved for China in the American policy planning. One of the important effects of this change was the intense efforts to formulate an integrated policy towards the entire region. Till now there was no such global or even regional approach to the problems. Different groups in the Department of State as well as among the general public focused their attention on one country or other. The American Administration approached the problems not as parts of the whole, but in their individual context. Though there was a general consensus of opinion about the opposition to communism, it gave rise to the most varied interpretations when applied to the complex situation in Asia.

With the success of communism in China the Department of State gradually began feeling its way towards a policy in Southeast Asia. In fact, even before the Civil War came to an end and the new regime was proclaimed, the United States had begun taking steps to meet the communist challenge. President Truman in his inaugural address of 20 January 1949, had advanced the Point Four idea

of technical aid and assistance to the underdeveloped nations of Southeast Asia. On 24 July 1949 Dean Acheson the Secretary of State called for "the best brains available" to work on a China policy, in a full scale effort to create a new pattern for American diplomacy in this area. A Committee of Consultants under Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup was appointed with the function of reappraisal and reorientation of the US policy. Its task was to review the reasons which led to the impasse in China and devise ways of preventing such conditions from being repeated in the countries of Southeast Asia. This policy as spelled out in the various public statements by the President and the Secretary of State, was one of containing communism with a special twist to the Asian situation. It was containment of the Soviet Union plus China. The first six months of 1950 were an anxious period of "fact-finding and fence-mending", in which there were a rapid succession of official missions, major policy speeches, serious Congressional debates and increased diplomatic activity all directed to an area that had received only secondary consideration till now.

The change in the American attitude towards Southeast Asia had its special influence on its policy towards Vietnam. Till now the United States confined itself to expressing its general and almost casual sympathy to the national movement and mildly persuading the French to grant greater autonomy. But now the United States was compelled to decide its future course of action more specifically. On 30 December 1949, President Truman approved a key National Security Council study on Asia, designated N.S.C. 48/2. The document directed that "the United States on its own initative should scrutinize closely the development of threats from communist aggression." It concluded that "particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China."[53] In February 1950, the N.S.C. decided that French Indo-China was important to U.S. security interests and that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in South East Asia. "Indo-China is a key area and is under immediate threat". The N.S.C. for the first time, formulated the domino theory in South East Asia and believed that if Indo-China became communist, Thailand and Burma also would follow.[54] In this the US Administration was faced with two questions. Firstly, could it afford, in the face of the emergence of a big communist power in Asia, to separate itself from the friendly Western nations on whose co-operation its security in Europe presum-

ably depended ? The countries of the West had to work out a mutually acceptable basis for co-operation with each other, and with Asia, in their efforts to contain communism. The second question the US foreign policy-makers had to resolve, was to choose between a communist or a pro-communist government claiming to have popular support, and a "legitimate" but not very popular government associated with and acting under the orders of the old colonial power.

The Elysee Accords of March 1949, presented the United States with such a situation in Vietnam. Obviously, the United States chose to recognize the French sponsored, non-communist regime of Bao Dai as against the Ho Chi Minh Government. The task of timing such a recognition was made easier for the United States by the recognition of Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam by the communist world during January 1950. Following the ratification of the Elysee Agreements by the French Assembly on 2 Febuary 1950, the United States recognized the Bao Dai regime on 7 February 1950, as an "independent State" within the French Union. It is, however, incorrect to say that the American decision to recognize Bao Dai's regime was caused or even occasioned by the communist recognition of the rival regime. Even as early as December 1947 the visit of William C. Bullitt to Vietnam and his meeting with Bao Dai had given an impression of American support for Bao Dai, and this had convinced the French that the United States had taken an initiative in launching "the Bao Dai Experiment." Once again the leading American newspaper *New York Times* reported as early as January 1949, that the French Government had received assurances from the United States that it favoured the French effort to make peace in Vietnam by setting up Bao Dai as the leader. The United States viewed Bao Dai as the only hope of stability in that strategically and economically important corner of Asia. The United States also had recognized that it was better for France to remain in the existing outposts, by coming to terms with the nationalist movements.[55] Thus the United States offered its support to Bao Dai in view of the Chinese communist success and hence the the unquestioned welcome accorded to the Elysee Accords.

Again, even while the French Parliament was debating the ratification of the Elysee Agreements, the US Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup on 27 January 1950 took the unusual step of extending to Bao Dai, on behalf of the Secretary of State, the confident best wishes "of the American Government for the future of the State of Vietnam

with which it looks forward to establishing a closer relationship."[56] Thus the United States had opted for the Bao Dai regime even before the Soviet Union recognised the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Hence one may not agree with Secretary Acheson's statement that "the recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement came as a surprise". The Soviet recognition only provided a suitable opportunity for the American recognition of the Bao Dai regime.

Faced with the prospects of communist success in China, the American policy-makers had been searching for a barrier or even a secure toe-hold from which they could hope to repel the flow of communism towards Southeast Asia. They seemed to have found, if not a barrier, at least a toe-hold in Vietnam though its military situation or strategic potential was still dubious. The French saw in the evolving American mood a last chance opening before them to save their almost hopelessly compromised position.

The American recognition of Bao Dai followed by a similar recognition by the British, had its own implications. It showed the view that the French had given up any idea of domination and that there was nothing in the French policy to which the nationalists in Vietnam need object. It indicated that France which stood long alone in its fight against Vietnamese nationalism should now be able to count on the alliance of the United States. It showed that the United States had abandoned the "wait and see" policy in Southeast Asia and had decided to cordon off communism in the East; and that it recognized the presence of the French forces to be necessary in order to confront the communist threat in Southeast Asia with an effective counterweight.

The US recognition of Bao Dai had a mixed reception at home. Ambassador Jessup said this did not mean support for "continuing colonialism". Agreeing with this interpretation as a "correct one", the *New York Times* called the recognition as a "welcome and necessary step."[57] It called the Russian recognition of Ho, "a grave step" which violated the diplomatic procedure. The USSR, it was asserted, had recognized a rebel fighting against a major power with whom the former had a treaty of friendship. The paper held the view that there was no alternative to Bao Dai and that the recognition was necessary in giving him support and opportunity for his nationalist movement. It felt that the hope of saving Indo-China lay with the native nationalism backed by the hatred for the Chinese and opposition to com-

munism, and that this would not be possible for the French to achieve.

Walter W. Waggoner, writing in the *New York Times*, said "The recognition was in accordance with the U.S. policy of making friends with the people of Asia, who were just emerging from colonialism and checking communism in South-East Asia."[58] The recognition, however, was opposed by Harold Isaacs, who wrote that it was an "ill-conceived adventure doomed to end in another self-inflicted defeat" as in China.[59] He wrote it would not help in checking communism in Asia since it had already driven a wedge between the United States and the countries of South-East Asia. He said the assumptions on which the recognition was based were not valid. It was a "victory for the French", he added, "but a defeat for hopes of an improved American position in South Asia." The *New Republic* found in it "a sharp change from the policy that was announced by Secretary Acheson in his National Press Club speech of 12 January 1950. In its view, it was bound to end up as "disastrous a failure" as the policy towards Chiang Kai-shek's China had earlier been.[60] It had earlier pointed out the dangers inherent in such an attitude in "trying to move Asia as a pawn in an external struggle," and suggested "a shift in America's concern away from our interest, towards Asia's interest." [61]

The American recognition of the Elysee Accords was welcomed by M. Pignon, the French High Commissioner in Vietnam, mainly because France had felt that the American attitude in the case of Indonesia and Indo-China was "strangely at odds" with its policy in other parts of the world. By the recognition, the High Commissioner said, the United States had given "a good start to the Bao Dai Experiment" and that it brought "new hope and encouragement."[62]

The American recognition of Bao Dai, generally speaking, antagonized the feelings of many Asians. Many of them could not see in it evidence of American sympathy and support for their struggle for independence, but rather an effort to ram a political solution down the throats of the Indo-Chinese. It set in motion a chain reaction of doubts, fears and suspicions of the US policy in Asia and its motives. The whole reason for what may be called the misguided policy of the United States was the practice of looking at Asian problems in the context of the Western European situation and not as purely Asian ones. It allowed itself to be dictated by the European and, in parti-

cular the French interests and calculations, and by the strategems of the cold war, which distorted its long term vision and the traditional belief it had in self-determination. Soedjatinoko, the Chief of Indonesia's Mission to the United Nations, said, "The American action was a support for the French colonial war and for a feudal ruler who could maintain himself only by relying on a foreign power." [63] *The Leader*, an Indian newspaper called it a "rehabilitation of colonialism."[64] *The Hindu* was of opinion that by supporting Bao Dai who derived his strength from the French colonial regime, the United States had alienated all nationalist sentiment in Indo-China.[65] The Indian opinion regretted that the United States should have viewed the Indo-Chinese situation in terms of the necessities of cold war. According to *The Hindustan Times* the American recognition of Bao Dai showed its continued belief that communism could be contained militarily. [66] *New Times of Burma* was equally critical of the American and British attitude to the Bao Dai Government. It called their approach to the Indo-Chinese issue "indefensible" and questioned their right to impose their will on others.[67] Amar Lahiri writing in the same newspaper, held the view that "hasty" diplomatic moves on the part of the Western Powers had converted Vietnam into a "veritable tinder box".[68] The *Pakistan Times* lamented that the experience in China had not made the United States wiser in Asia.[69] The pattern of supporting economically, militarily and morally, a regime that did not have the backing of the majority of the public opinion, was repeated in Vietnam too. The United States had established itself in Asia as a power which always backed the wrong horses, in its anxiety to hold communism. Further, in the eyes of the Asians who tended to think more in terms of imperialism versus independence, the US policies appeared not merely anti-communist but perilously close to being anti-Asian.

In Vietnam the motives of American aid were suspected. The Vietnamese Nationalists interpreted the American recognition of Bao Dai as a step towards exporting the former's farming equipments, shoes and other post-war products which were piling up within their own country. Their main aim was not so much the industrial development of Vietnam as much to turning her into a potential market for American agricultural products.[70]

Towards this purpose, the Vietnamese viewed, the Americans might even like to replace the French. "They were helping the French Army to drag on their losing war against the Vietnamese people,"

said Truong Chinh, thereby "increasing their interference in Vietnam affairs."[71]

The immediate consequence of the recognition of the two regimes in Vietnam by the two big Powers was the internationalization of the problem, a step which the French were anxious to avoid till then. It converted Vietnam into a cockpit for both the cold and hot wars. It meant, the United States had aligned itself for the first time with a colonial power in Asia to solve a national political impasse.

In view of the recognition by the communist world of the Viet Minh regime in January 1950, thereby leading to the establishment of another communist government in Asia, it becomes interesting to study the relationship of Ho Chi Minh with the leaders of the two important communist states, the Soviet Union and China. Following the Soviet recognition of the Viet Minh, the Secretary of State Dean Acheson issued a statement on 1 February 1950, in which he said the recognition "should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colours as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indo-China."[72] The Secretary's statement was based on the assumption that Ho Chi Minh being a "Moscow-trained communist", was subject to the dictates of the Kremlin and that the Viet Minh was a communist outfit, masquerading as a nationalist movement. Lincoln White, a State Department spokesman, asserted that Ho Chi Minh had now been proved to be an agent of World Communism and not a sincere nationalist, as he claimed.[73] The State Department officials viewed this communist recognition as another move in the Soviet attempt to create a ring of satellite states. The official view of the United States was one that had much currency at that time though there were, even at that time, some dissenting voices.

There is a broad agreement about the background of Ho Chi Minh and his political and ideological leanings. He had been a communist since the 1920s and had maintained close contact with Moscow and the communists in China. Though this fact had been fairly well known the United States chose to co-operate with him towards the end of the war, in consideration of the resistance he and his followers offered to the Japanese. The American authorities in China even pleaded with Chiang Kai-shek in 1943 to release Ho from prison. The United States also did not list him as a communist in the Congressional Report on "Five Hundred Leading Foreign Commu-

nists".[74] The Pentagon study too revealed that a survey made by the State Department's Office of Intelligence and Research in the fall of 1948 concluded that it could not find any hard evidence that Ho Chi Minh actually took his orders from Moscow. The authors of the Pentagon study too believed that "if there is a Moscow directed conspiracy in South-East Asia, Indo-China is an anomaly so far."[75]

The change in the official American thinking of Ho Chi Minh being an orthodox communist and his movement in Indo-China as being inspired by international communism, seemed to have occurred somewhere in the middle of 1948. The American newspapermen in South-East Asia began reporting about the increased tempo in the communist activities in Asia and asserting that they were directed and co-ordinated from Moscow. Robert Trumbull of the *New York Times* wrote that there was a solid communist front maintained throughout Asia. The front was directed by the "Eastern Political Department of Moscow" and it conducted its activities through the Asian trade unions and student organizations.[76] Trumbull added that the various Asian conferences, including the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi,[77] served as a forum for the European communists to contact their counterparts in Asia. Both Trumbull as well as the correspondent of the Associated Press reported that the main aim of the communists was to deprive the Western Powers of South-East Asia's natural resources by disrupting normal life and trade and to strike for full political control when the suitable time arrived. Both asserted that Indo-China was the place upon which the communists placed high hopes. Trumbull even counted Indo-China as already a success for International communism as, in his view, the continuing guerilla warfare had already destroyed the agricultural production.[78]

Milton Sacks also believed that communism in South-East Asia was a co-ordinated movement, the objectives of which were to eliminate the Western influence completely, and create instead communist controlled "People's democracies".[79] Richard Stebbins of the Council of Foreign Relations, New York, thought that the Soviet Union would make China the executant of its designs in Asia and would try to exploit the Asian admiration of Mao Tse-tung for its purposes.[80]

These newspaper reports received official confirmation in a statement by Michael W. McDermott, the State Department spokesman, on 16 September 1948. The statement for the first time labelled the unrest in Indo-China and other South-East Asian countries, as being

communist-inspired and declared that the communists in these regions, in order to win power, posed as champions of the cause of local nationalists.[81] It was at the same time that the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin also stated that the communist troubles in South-East Asia were part of a worldwide subversive programme of the Cominform. [82] Western apprehensions about the communist activities in Indo-China were strengthened by the reports that the Chinese communists intended to race down to the Indo-China and Burma borders to help the native communist forces to gain control of strategic bases in South-East Asia.[83]

According to this line of thinking, the communist recognition of Ho Chi Minh was a further step in this direction. It interpreted the recognition as a signal achievement for Ho Chi Minh, as in contrast to the Greek government of General Marcos, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam could now legally and openly acquire arms and material from its strong communist neighbours. It would also help domestically in introducing the communist ideology in a much more open and bold way.[84] Representative Judd thought Ho was subservient to Soviet Union and that Stalin made use of Ho Chi Minh for his own purposes. Since Stalin had found it impossible to eliminate Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, added Judd, Stalin sought to patch up with Tito. Towards this purpose, he used Ho, by making the latter recognize Tito. Thus, according to Judd, the Soviet Union, Viet Minh and Yugoslavia were all part of the same communist bloc.[85] The statement of Dean Acheson on the Soviet recognition of Ho agreed with this view, and laid the basis for an international power conflict in Vietnam.

The official opinion of Ho being the leader of a communist movement, the Viet Minh as part of international communism and the wisdom of Washington in recognizing the Bao Dai regime, have been disputed by many writers. Bernard Fall, a well-known writer on Indo-China, was of the opinion that the relations between the Soviet Union and the Viet Minh had not been "unfailingly friendly and close", as the West believed. In the past three years (1946-49) of Viet Minh's resistance or prior to that, the Russians had been quite indifferent and detached to the Vietnamese cause. The maximum extent to which Stalin went was to approve of President Roosevelt's proposal for a trusteeship. "Soviet policy towards Vietnam —very much as had been said about American policy—'cloaked nothing but real isolation from Indo-Chinese events," Fall wrote.[86] Fall traced the reason for this

apparent detachment to the possibility that in the post-war period France might become communist-controlled. If that were to take place, Russia hoped that it could control the French colonial empire too. In this context, it could be noted that the French Communist Party in the initial period remained aloof, then in 1947 merely voiced their support of the Viet Minh but extended no material aid. When the war broke out, it did not oppose the French colonial war and even supported the French budget for the Vietnamese war. Even the French Premier Paul Ramadier mistook it as an indication of a policy of restraint and correctness by the Soviet Union.[87] The Soviet Union, as much as the West, had approached Vietnam through Europe, Fall argued.

A similar appraisal was made by Oliver E. Clubb, Jr. Quoting *New Times* (Moscow) of 1 Novembe r1945, Clubb argued that the Soviet Union was almost totally ignorant about the ways of the Viet Minh and that it had no link with Ho Chi Minh.[88] Nor did the Soviet Union, which supported Sukarno's non-communist Republic in the United Nations, heed the Viet Minh request to discuss its case in the Security Council. The Viet Minh too on its part looked to the United States and Chiang's China, rather than to the Frenc h and Russian communists, for support to their movement. It was only in late 1949 that rebuffed by the West, Ho turned to the Chinese communists for assistance. Even here it was not the Soviet Union, Clubb argued, but Communist China which had its traditionally imperialist aim over Annam, that was the first to recognize the Viet Minh in January 1950.

Another well-known writer who agrees with this viewpoint is Ellen J. Hammer. She argues that the motives behind the Soviet recognition of Ho Chi Minh were not so much to embarrass the West or due to the fact that he was a communist, as much as because it was a part of the Soviet diplomacy of supporting "anti-imperialist minded regimes", whether they were communist or not. She quotes the example of Soviet recognition of Sukarno's government in Indonesia, a little after it had crushed a communist revolt and executed its principal leaders.[89] Miss Hammer asserted that the US Secretary of State and even the Viet Minh did not understand these "Soviet subtleties" and that by his statement, the Secretary "gave the *coup de grace* to Western sympathy for the Viet Minh." Many of these writers believe, in short, that till the year 1950 there was practically no contact between Ho Chi Minh and the Kremlin, let alone any directions

from the Cominform. It was the Western indifference to the nationalist cause, and their grooming of Bao Dai after 1948 which pushed the Viet Minh to the communist bloc. Robert Shaplen agrees with this view when he writes that "...Ho rejected by the West, no longer had any option...but to attach himself firmly to the communist camp".[90]

There were, however, others who interpreted the motives of the Soviet recognition differently. The well-known columnist Walter Lippmann reasoned the action of the Soviet Union "as a march over the West". The Soviet recognition , according to him, compelled the United States to recognize Bao Dai, which meant keeping the French and the United States embroiled in Indo-China, and also keeping China away from the Western Powers.[91] It would also mean that the United States would have to back all the three spots of Formosa, Korea and Indo-China simultaneously. By recognizing Ho the Russians prevented a "just settlement" between Ho Chi Minh and the Franco-American combination.

P. J. Honey, a British specialist on Vietnamese affairs, gives Ho Chi Minh the credit or discredit, of converting the Viet Minh from a nationalist movement into a communist front.[92] He asserts that the shift in the nature of the Viet Minh had occurred somewhere in late 1949, and the communist recognition of 1950 only confirmed this shift. Hence the question arises: did Ho undertake this shift on his own or was he under the communist, especially Chinese communist pressure ? Honey argues that Ho, a man of intelligence, could not but be aware of the consequences of his action: namely, the possibility of United States jumping into the fray on the side of the French and thus prolonging the war and enlarging its scale. So his conclusion seems to be, especially in view of the subsequent close relations between the Viet Minh and Peking, that communist China was responsible for turning the Vietnamese crisis into a fight against the "Free World".

In conclusion, one might say that Ho Chi Minh had been a communist as early as 1920 and had been in contact with the European communists before 1945. He was associated with other Indo-Chinese communists in the nationalist movement. But this does not rule out the possibility, that the Viet Minh was a coalition of all elements who were primarily opposed to the re-imposition of the French rule in Indo-China. In fact as late as April 1949, Ho Chi Minh maintained that his regime was a national coalition govern-

ment of many parties and non-party men. Nor was the Viet Minh very close to the Kremlin. Though sympathetic to the Viet Minh's cause, Moscow would make no commitment nor extend any assistance. The same could be said about its relations with the Chinese communists. The Viet Minh did accept the Chinese view of bringing about a communist revolution but at no time was it directed either by Peking or Moscow. While accepting and implementing the Chinese model, Ho was very cautious in his attitude to Mao's China and was the last to recognise China in December 1949. Even then the statement was cautious and moderate and was not couched in militant or communistic ideological terms. Hence one would believe that the contacts between the Viet Minh and the Chinese Communist Party before 1949 were remote and not very significant. Nor did the Viet Minh get any material aid from China before January 1956. This might be partly due to the Viet Minh eagerness to play Nationalist China against the French colonial rulers; but it was also due to the keenness to chart out an independent course for itself. The United States did not recognise the true nature of the nationalist movement in Vietnam. Instead by following the French policy of divide and rule, it chose to extend aid to Bao Dai and thereby was responsible for the continued war in Vietnam.

BETTING ON A LOSING HORSE

The recognition of Bao Dai's regime opened the doors of Indo-China to American material aid. It began a period in which a policy toward Vietnam's future began taking shape. This, coupled with the communist success in China, gave an opportunity to that section in the Department of State which had been emphasizing the need for greater attention to the South-East Asian situation and insisting on a sympathetic, active support and encouragement of the economic, social and political awakening of this area. The first few months of the year 1950, were a period of great activity in the South-East Asian section of the Department of State.

In fact, even before the recognition the Secretary of State in an address before the National Press Club in Washington on 12 January 1950, laid down the essentials of the US policy towards Asia, though in rather guarded terms. Among other things, Acheson emphasized the need for military security of the area from "expansionist communism". He clearly specified that "The American defence

perimeter runs from the Aleutians to Japan, the Ryukyus and the Philippines."[93] While stressing military considerations, the Secretary also recognized the existence of other problems which could not be solved by military means. Thus, the US approach to Vietnam, following the recognition of the Bao Dai Government was one that combined both military as well as economic assistance, though in varying proportions. Under this broad approach, the specific aims of the US policy towards Vietnam came to be spelled out. An indication of the future policy toward Vietnam was given in the declaration that recognized the Bao Dai regime. The Department of State in this statement announced that it was considering steps to further the political stability and the growth of effective democratic institutions in Vietnam. It also mentioned the American intention to take steps in collaboration with other like-minded nations, so that this development would not be hindered by internal dissension fostered from abroad.[94]

In January 1950, Ambassador Jessup began a three-month fact-finding tour of fourteen Far Eastern countries, which included Vietnam. One of the purposes of this tour was to explore the ways and means in which the United States could help toward economic and political stability and security, and to review US policy with the American diplomats in the field. The tour convinced him of the existence of real communist threat to the countries of South-East Asia as a result of of the presence of the Chinese army on their very borders.[95] He also viewed it as probable that Moscow and Peking would help Ho Chi Minh in the latter's bid to control the whole of Vietnam.[96] He concluded that the situation could not be saved except by a more decisive American action. The Jessup mission was also marked by a conference of American Ambassadors in South-East Asia on 13 February 1950 at Bangkok. The Conference agreed among other things that the United States should be ready to give arms and economic aid to any nation if the people showed a will to fight the communist threat. It thought the Chinese communists would supply arms to Ho Chi Minh, though they might not invade Vietnam. On his return Jessup gave the impressions of his tour in a hearing in the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in which he called Vietnam one of the priority problems and advised sending military aid, especially small arms to help support the anti-communist effort there.

One of the immediate and important results of Jessup's Asian tour was the recognition of Bao Dai's regime—a clear effort to bols-

ter up an anti-communist regime. Within a fortnight Secretary Acheson gave his speech of "total diplomacy", in which he laid stress on the change in the US policy towards Asia and a new willingness to apply the Truman Doctrine to South-East Asia. Shortly thereafter the United States invited France to submit a list of arms and military equipment which the latter might want to be sent to the Bao Dai regime. France had also been asked to draw up a plan for the future, indicating what might be achieved through the US aid, towards the stabilization of the Vietnamese situation on the basis of virtual independence. On 27 February, France submitted a detailed list of the war materials amounting to thirty million dollars. The French case for US arms was further strengthened by the rumour that communist China was helping Ho Chi Minh with heavier arms and military training. The French also asked for an effective economic blockade of China, in an effort to offset the advantages of Ho.

Meanwhile, on 23 February 1950, was announced the proposed economic survey of South Asia by a special mission, headed by R. Allen Griffin, publisher of the *Monterey Peninsula Herald* and the former Deputy Head of the ECA Mission in China. The Griffin Mission's task was to study the needs of the area and to prepare the ground for technical assistance in the future. Its terms of reference also included, in addition, the possibility of ECA assistance to Vietnam. [97] The Griffin Mission submitted a report recommending a programme of $64 million in economic aid and $30 million in military aid to South-East Asia. Vietnam seemed to have received priority in the American policy, as the area where communist activities were alarming and as one with easy accessibility to possible Chinese communist interference, It came to be known that it had asked for immediate short-range assistance programmes with a view to help the French achieve political and military stability and to underwrite a public health programme. This would save the French the dollar drain and also win the people's heart for the "liberating" troops[98].

The official decision to extend both military and economic aid to Indo-China received widespread support from public opinion which demanded prompt and proper action on the part of the United States. The American move was depicted as aimed at stabilizing the Bao Dai regime rather than as one of assisting the French military effort against the Viet Minh. Representatives Judd, James G.Fulton(Republican, Pennsylvania) and Javits called for increased attention to developments in South-East Asia. Judd criticized the view that the United States

should not align itself with any government in South-East Asia, for fear that it would be deemed as supporting the reactionary, feudalistic and undemocratic governments. He thought very few people in Asia understood the meaning of democracy but that they would understand and appreciate the American assistance better. Javits, on the other hand, advocated a Pacific Pact for the Far Eastern countries and said the United States should act as a "shield" for these states.[99]

General William J. Donovan, the Chief of the OSS in Hanoi in 1947 and the Chairman of the Committee on United Europe, made a bold proposal of military aid on the basis of the entire South-East Asia as one strategic unit, under a Supreme Commander with discretionary authority to deal with military, political and economic measures for that area. He believed that the new governments in Asia would gladly accept the American leadership and American military help. He would not like to discuss the colonial question in Indo-China; for him, it was purely a question of communist penetration. Hence not to lose the war in Vietnam, America should spend money and try to win it. Not to do so now would make the war degenerate into an expensive shooting war.[100]

The *New York Times* too supported the new policy towards Vietnam, as one that could thwart the sweeping expansion of communism in South-East Asia. It thought Vietnam was even more important than Greece, as it kept the French army in the other side of the world. [101] It did not, however, specify what type of aid should be extended, though one would think from its previous editorials, that it emphasized economic aid.

In the meantime, the US official opinion towards French rule had also undergone a gradual change. The months following the recognition of Bao Dai witnessed a *volte face* in the US attitude to the nationalist question and to France's fighting the war in Vietnam. It was recognized widely that the war was bleeding France white and the French economy was in a "serious" condition. The stationing of a number of its effective troops in Vietnam and the financial drain on a military budget of over 400 million francs, had affected its ability to play a larger part in North Atlantic Security.[102] However, this did not deter the United States from supporting the war in Vietnam. Nor did the United States administration support the view that the French should withdraw their troops from Vietnam. Acheson thought such a step "would bring about a very serious condition".[103] Ambassador Averell Harriman, the US Special Represen-

tative in Europe, though aware of the weakness of the French economy, thought such a "withdrawal on the part of the French which would contribute to extending the tide of communism in Asia would be a serious blunder."[104] Barry Bingham, Chief, ECA Special Mission to France, thought that France had made some appreciable gains in the battle of Vietnam and in the economic, political and military fronts within France. The ECA representative had also argued for a continuation of the fighting to "save" Vietnam, on the plea that it had been a dollar earner for France before the war started and that once Viet Nam was "saved" and the war was over, she would become again an important trading country with the West.[105] In the face of the weak economy of France and the keenness that the war should go on, the only logical conclusion seemed to be that the United States should step in and render massive assistance to the French, both to recover economically and to bring the war to a successful close. This decision to support the war moulded the subsequent American policy towards the French and the Vietnamese.

Hence the Department of State decided to offer both military and economic aid to Vietnam. It, however, found the various suggestions for a Pacific Pact or a Far Eastern Recovery Programme impossible. It preferred that such a pact should be arrived at by the Asian countries themselves and the United States should only encourage such efforts. To do anything more, would be to hinder such efforts.[106]

The Department of State went ahead and formulated its policy of aid to Vietnam. In the course of this, there developed an interesting controversy. It was with regard to who should be the direct recipient of the American aid. The United States, in the initial stage seemed to be keen to send the arms to the local Vietnamese authorities, so that it would not be used by the French army in Vietnam. This, however, was not acceptable to the French. Leon Pignon, the French High Commissioner in Indo-China, in an interview to the *L'Aurore*, said that to defeat Ho, the Americans should give their aid in the "most direct and efficient way" and that the French alone should be made responsible for it. He said it would be more effective if aid was given to the French than to the young administration of Bao Dai, and that such a course would enable the United States avoiding any wastage of its aid, as it happened in the case of Chiang Kai-shek's China.[107] General Marcel Carpentier, the French Commander-in-Chief had made it clear that he would resign if the United

States gave military aid directly to the Vietnamese.[108] The French seemed to be afraid that direct aid to Vietnam might mean the replacement of France by the United States in Vietnam, and that the Vietnamese might turn their eyes towards Washington instead of Paris. They were also afraid the American businessmen might seek economic advantages in Vietnam at the cost of the French. General de Gaulle was also critical of what he called foreign interference in France's relations with any part of the French Union, notably with Indo-China.[109] The French, while being anxious for the American aid for Indo-China, were reluctant to allow American presence there. The dismissal of Nguyen Phan Long in May 1950 as the Prime Minister of Bao Dai's Government, could be traced to these factors. Long had made it clear that he wanted the friendship of the American Government and that he wanted the American aid, both military and economic, to be given directly to the Vietnamese.[110]

The *New York Times* suggested setting up a joint Franco-Indo-Chinese authority for the purpose of taking advantage of the American assistance, with the insistence that it should be directed to Indo-China and not to the French in Indo-China and that it should be used in complete co-ordination with the French forces and the French Command.[111] The economic aid was finally given jointly to both France and the Associated States of Indo-China.

In accordance with the pronouncements and opinions expressed inside the country, the United States announced its aid programme to Indo-China, following a meeting on 8 May in Paris between the US Secretary of State and the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman.[112] In announcing the aid, the Secretary said that the situation in Indo-China was serious and warranted such an aid, in order to restore stability and to permit the Associated States "to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." The Secretary also stressed certain points in the course of his announcement ; (i) Primary responsibility for the defence of Indo-China would fall on France and the government of Indo-China; (ii) US aid was being extended for the "restoration of stability" and the development of genuine nationalism; and (iii) American aid would not go to France alone but to both France and the Associated States of Indo-China. The American official attitude thus committed itself to the continuation of French rule in Indo-China by recognizing the existing links between France and Indo-China; and reconciling itself with the French position.

A newspaper report, however, mentioned an American condition to its aid to Indo-China. It speaks of an American demand to the French that the struggle in Vietnam would not continue to remain one between the French forces and the Viet Minh. The American insistence reportedly was that eventually a native Vietnamese army backed by the local population should emerge to carry on the struggle against the communists. On the other hand, a report quoting the French Minister for Information, Teitgen, said that the American aid to Indo-China was not conditional and that the United States wanted to "help France to protect the independence of Vietnam within the French Union".[113]

Following the Acheson-Schuman meeting in Paris, the Department of State announced on 9 May, its proposal to spend $ 64 million on economic aid to South-East Asia during the following fifteen months. Out of this, a sum of $23 million was to go to Indo-China. The ECA had also planned to send a team of experts, to assist in administering the economic aid.[114]

Following another meeting of the foreign ministers of the USA, France and England in London on 18 May, the United States increased its extent of collaboration in South-East Asia. The United States agreed to the view that the economic and political well-being of France and Britain rested largely on the preservation of their "legitimate interests" in South-East Asia and that the United States should contribute to their defence and prevent their loss for the West.[115] This "defence" of the "legitimate interests" found its expression, very soon, in the form of military aid to the French in Indo-China. The aid, authorized under thc Mutual Defence Assistance Act of 1949, was extended exclusively to the French. Defending the aid before the Congress, Acheson said "Military aid, when such aid can be effective is an essential element of our course of action." From this point started the long period of US economic and military aid to Vietnam and a vigorous effort on the part of the United States to influence the course of events in that country. A new orientation in the policy outlook of the United States seemed to be in the offing and the United States was slowly evolving a co-ordinated policy towards South-East Asia. On 10 June, the Defence Department announced the first shipments of arms aid to Vietnam. It was to consist of eight C-47 transport planes and was to be followed by six 158-foot naval landing craft.[116]

The United States' decision to send economic and military aid fell short of the expectations that the past statements had raised in various parts of the world. Asian opinion firmly asserted that this policy would not help solve the Vietnamese question. In their view, the struggle in Vietnam was essentially nationalist and only the granting of independence by the French, including foreign affairs and military control, would have won the nationalist and neutral elements to Bao Dai. In the absence of an assurance of independence, France still remained the national enemy, and the mere act of Soviet recognition of Ho did not make him undesirable in the nationalist eyes. Nor had the United States yet decided "to intervene" in a major way in the Vietnamese situation. For the present, it believed, the French and Bao Dai could serve very well as the means to combat the march of communism under Ho. The American Administration had not made a wholehearted commitment, in terms of aid. The Korean crisis which broke out towards the end of June 1950, influenced the future actions of the United States in Vietnam and thus marked the beginning of a more active US policy there for the next few years.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D. C.), 14 April 1947, p. 788. Hereafter referred to as *Bulletin*.
2. Department of State, *The United States and Non-self-Governing Territories* (Washington, D. C., 1947), p. 44.
3. Ibid.
4. "Disease Knows No Frontiers", ed., *New York Times*, 20 August 1948. This view was also supported by Constantine Brown, "Europe First Policy has weakened United States in Pacific", *Washington Sunday Star*, 2 January 1949. And also by James F. Kearney, S. J., "The American Failure in China" *Columbia*, December 1948, cited in ibid., 5 January 1949.
5. As cited in U. S., *Congressional Record* (Washington, D. C.), vol. 95, 25 June 1949, p. A432.
6. *New York Times*, 20 August, 1948. The newspaper had reiterated this view in many an editorial; for example, see "A lesson from Indonesia", ed., ibid., 31 December 1948 and an earlier one on "Indo-China and Indonesia", ed., ibid., 12 September 1947.
7. Ibid., 11 November 1948.
8. U.S., *Congressional Record*, Vol. 95, 8 February 1949, p. 1010.
9. "American Foreign Policy", ed., The *Hindu* (Madras), 31 October 1945.

10. "Economic Situation", ed., *Eastern Economist* (New Delhi), 2 January 1948.
11. *New York Times*, 20 February 1947.
12. Raymond Dennett and Robert K. Turner, eds, *Documents on American Foreign Relations, July 1, 1945 December 31, 1945* (London, 1948), vol. 8, pp. 794-5.
13. Oliver E. Clubb, Jr., *The United States and the Sino-Soviet Bloc in South-east Asia* (Washington, D.C., 1962), p. 51. Clubb was, at this time, an official of the Department of State, who had a first hand experience in China for more than two decades as an American officer in various parts of China.
14. *Pentagon Papers* (New York, 1971), pp. 7-8.
15. Dean Campbell, "Vietnamese Plan, an appeal to U.N.", *New York Times*, 10 February 1947 and also ibid., 25 December 1947.
16. Ibid., 20 January 1947.
17. Secretary of State George C. Marshall in a Press Conference on 7 February 1947. Ibid., 8 February 1947.
18. Ibid., 29 January 1947.
19. In December 1946, the French had a Socialist-led coalition government under M. Leon Blum and this was replaced by another government led by the Socialist Premier, Paul Ramadier. This government was in office till 20 November 1947. The last few months of Ramadier Government witnessed the revival of Gaullist forces which secured nearly 40 per cent of the votes in the municipal elections of October 1947.
20. Ibid., 16 December 1948.
21. U.S., *Congressional Record*, 1 April 1949, p. 3770.
22. Ibid., p. 6508.
23. Ibid., p. 6509.
24. Ibid., pp. 3699 and 4065.
25. As reported by *The Hindu*, 26 October 1945.
26. *New York Times*, 28 November 1945.
27. U.S., Senate, 81 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Hearings, *Military Assistance Program* (Washington, D.C., 1949), p. 229.
28. "Indo-China stalemate", ed., *New York Times*, 15 July 1947. See also "France and Her Empire", ed., ibid., 9 January 1947; "Personalities in Indo-China", ed., ibid., 7 March 1947; "France in Indo-China", ed., ibid., 30 March 1947; and "Hope in Indo-China", ed., ibid., 6 May 1947.
29. Edgar Ansel Mowrer, "State Department Fumbles, Pacific Goes Anti American" as cited in the U.S., *Congressional Record*, n. 5, p. A2865. Also C.L. Sulzerberger, "World's Great Empires Suffer Internal Blows", ibid., vol. 4, 5 January 1947, p. 5.
30. As reported by *The Hindu*, 14 May 1947.
31. Ibid . 6 January 1949.
32. As reported, ibid., 15 March 1947.
33. "The Trusteeship Question", ed., *New Republic* (New York), 28 January 1946, p. 113.
34. "America and the U.N.O.", ed., ibid., 25 February 1946, pp. 271-2.

35. Harold R. Isaacs, "Indo-China : A Fight For Freedom", ibid., 3 February 1947, pp. 17-18.
36. Walter H. Briggs, "Asia's Old Order Crumbles", ibid., 13 December 1948, p. 18.
37. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, comp., *National Party Platforms 1840-1956* (Urbana, Ill., 1956), pp. 440-1.
38. According to an OSS officer who parachuted in Tonkin's jungle in May 1945, as cited by Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: The U.S. in Vietnam 1946-1966* (New York, 1966) p. 28.
39. *New York Times*, n. 13 (a).
40. Allan B. Cole, ed., *Conflict in Indo-China and International Repercussions* (Ithaca, 1956), pp. 26-27.
41. Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Vietnams : A Political and Military Analysis* (London, 1963), pp. 100-1. The Vietnamese flag was a five-pointed yellow star on a red field whereas the American insignia was a five-pointed white star.
42. Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indo-China* (Stanford, 1945), p. 131.
43. Fall, *Last Reflections on a War* (New York, 1967), p. 135.
44. *New York Times*, n. 13 (a).
45. *Le Monde* (Paris), 13 April 1947, as quoted by Hammer, n. 13, p. 130.
46. As reported in *New York Times*, 14 May 1947.
47. Ibid., 7 January 1947.
48. Ibid., 23 January 1947.
49. Ibid., 27 June 1948.
50. John F. Cady, "Background of United States Policy in Southeast Asia", in William Henderson, ed., *Southeast Asia, Problems of United States Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 21. Donald Lancaster also refers to this American offer, though neither of them have supported their statements by any official statement or primary source. Donald Lancaster. *The Emancipation of French Indo-China* (London, 1961), p. 181. Andrew Roth, the Far Eastern correspondent of *Nation* refers to this in his article. He writes, the United States as far back as September 1948 when the French had cooled off on the Bao Dai idea, had "nudged" the French along. The French leftists began calling Bao Dai "a man of the United States". Andrew Roth, "Night-Club Emperor", *Nation* (New York), 10 September 1949, p. 250.
51. *Bulletin*, 18 July 1949, p. 75.
52. *New York Times*, *Pentagon Papers* (New York, 1971), pp. 8-9.
53. Ibid, p. 9.
54. Ibid., p. 6.
55. *New York Times*, 26 January 1949; as also, "Outlook in Indo-China", ed., *The Hindu*, 23 July 1949.
56. *Bulletin*, 13 February 1950, p. 244.
57. "Recognising Indo-China", ed., *New York Times*, 8 February 1950, p. 26. See also "Bao Dai and Colonialism", ed., ibid., 5 February 1950 ; "Arms for Bao Dai", ed., ibid., 13 March 1950 and "Plans for Southeast Asia", ed., ibid., 27 March 1950.
58. Walter H. Waggoner, "U.S. Vietnam Tie is Due This Week", ibid., 5 February 1950, p. 12.

59. Harold Isaacs, "A New Disaster in Asia", *Leader* (Allahabad), 14 April 1950.
60. "The Struggle in Indo-China", ed., *New Republic* 13 February 1950, p. 9.
61. "A Peace Treaty for Japan", ed., ibid., 31 October 1949, p. 5.
62. *The Statesman* (Delhi), 25 July 1949.
63. *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 April 1950.
64. "Ho and Bao", ed., *The Leader*, 4 February 1950.
65. "Indo-China", ed., *The Hindu*, 16 October 1950.
66. "U.S. Policy in the Far East", ed., *Hindustan Times* (Delhi) 16 February 1950.
67. *New Times of Burma* (Rangoon), 31 January 1950.
68. Amar Lahiri, "Power Conflict in Vietnam", 4 June 1950.
69. "Sadder But Not Wiser", *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 10 August 1949.
70. *Viet Nam Information Bulletin* (Rangoon), 3 March 1950, pp. 2-3.
71. Ibid., 31 March 1950, pp. 6-7.
72. *Bulletin*, 13 February 1950, p. 244.
73. *The Hindu*, 2 February 1950.
74. As described by Andrew Roth, "Birth of New Leadership in Asia", *Indian News Chronicle*, 28 August 1949.
75. New York Times, n. 4.8(a)
76. *New York Times*, 23 March 1948.
77. This non-official conference was held in March 1947 on the initiative of the Indian Government and was attended by delegations from many Asian countries, independent and otherwise. The main purpose of the Conference was to stimulate co-operation among them by creating Asia-consciousness.
78. *New York Times*, 27 June 1948 and 18 July 1948.
79. Milton Sacks, "The Strategy of Communism in Southeast Asia", *Pacific Affairs* (Richmond, Va.), September 1950, p. 247.
80. Richard P. Stebbins, *The United States in World Affairs 1950* (New York, 1951), p. 174.
81. *New York Times*, 17 September 1948.
82. Ibid., 21 September 1948.
83. According to a report in *Hongkong Standard*, 6 May 1949.
84. Sacks, n. 66, p. 243.
85. U.S., House of Representatives, 81 Cong., sess. 2, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, *To Amend Economic Cooperation Act of 1948, As Amended* (Washington, D.C., 1950), p. 391.
86. Fall, n. 39 p. 195. Harold R. Isaacs, too expressed a similar view and described the Viet Minh, as an isolated movement. Isaacs, n. 37, pp. 12-19.
87. Hammer, n. 40, p. 201. Fall, however, attributes this statement to M. Schuman. Fall, n. 12, p. 196.
88. Clubb, Jr., n. 13, pp. 13-16.
89. Hammer, n. 40, p. 250.
90. Shaplen, n. 37, p. 54.
91. *The Hindu*, 3 February 1950.
92. P.J. Honey, *Communism in North Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 41-42.

93. Raymond Dennett and Robert K. Turner, eds, *Documents on American Foreign Relations January 1 - December 31, 1950* (London, 1951), Vol. 12, pp. 430-2.
94. Cole, n. 38, p. 117.
95. *The Hindu*, 19 February 1950.
96. Ibid., 7 February 1950.
97. Ibid., 25 February 1950.
98. *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 March 1950.
99. U.S., House of Representatives, 81 Cong., sess. 2, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, *To Amend Economic Cooperation Act of 1948, As Amended* (Washington, D.C., 1950), pp. 24-35, 256 and 372-3.
100. Ibid., pp. 254 and 269.
101. "Vietnam is the Greece of the Struggle for Asia", ed., *New York Times*, 15 February 1950.
102. The financial drain had been estimated as follows : The expenditure on Indo-China was estimated at 8 per cent of the total expenditure of the French treasury in 1949. This amounted to about 167 billion francs or $ 475,000,000. R.M. Bissel, the Assistant Administrator for Programs, ECA, in his statement, U.S., House of Representatives, n. 78, p. 86.
103. Ibid., p. 364.
104. Ibid., p. 88.
105. Ibid., p. 311.
106. Secretary Acheson, in his statement, ibid., pp. 35 and 366.
107. *The Hindu*, 13 May 1950.
108. Shaplen, n. 37, pp. 66-67.
109. *New York Times*, 2 May 1950.
110. As cited by Shaplen, n. 37.
111. "Arms for Bao Dai", ed., *New York Times*, 13 March 1950.
112. For the text of the statement, see *Bulletin*, 22 May 1950, p. 821.
113. *The Hindu*, 10 May 1950.
114. *New York Times*, 27 May 1950.
115. Benjamin Welles, "U.S. in Asia Backs Rights in Colonies", ibid., 20 May 1950.
116. *New York Times*, 11 June 1950.

IV

Slipping into the Abyss

The Korean War which broke out on 25 June 1950 between South Korea and North Korea marked a turning point in the politics of South-East Asia and the Far East. It had many implications for the United States both from the point of view of the communist strategy in Asia and in Europe, and of the shaping of an American policy in Asia. The West looked at the North Korean aggression primarily as a part of the global strategy of the communist world. It was interpreted as an indication that the Soviet Union was willing to force a military showdown in order to win independent and neutral countries, and that its tactics were no longer confined to relatively more peaceful but effective means like internal subversion, propaganda and peripheral warfare and nibblings. The Korean War was interpreted as an attempt by the communist world to test the strength and validity of the Western promises to come to the support of smaller nations, and the extent to which the West might go in order to protect its own interests. The Korean War, it was viewed, also showed that the communists chose to adopt a different strategy in Asia than the one

in Western Europe. The strengthening of the nations in Western Europe, economically through the Marshall Plan and militarily with the help of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) made a communist expansion in this region difficult. On the other hand the American reluctance to strengthen the economy of the Asian countries and their hesitant and incoherent approach to Asian problems had made communism even more popular in this region.

The communist action in Korea was also interpreted as a Russian attempt to use the Chinese as an instrument for the former's expansion in Asia, confining themselves to merely furnishing arms and equipment. The American opinion, both official and unofficial, believed broadly and firmly that the Korean crisis was inspired by the Soviet Union and executed by communist China, the latter exploiting its proximity and huge manpower. It is however doubtful whether this view of the Soviet aims and strategy stood the test. In the course of the war, especially after the Chinese intervention in November 1950, the United States began having second thoughts about the Chinese objectives and the pressures behind the Chinese intervention. The extent of Chinese participation by way of men and material, had far surpassed the estimate as warranted by the above calculation of Soviet strategy.[1]

Whatever were the speculations on the aim and role of the various communist Powers in the crisis, the United States found in it the first opportunity to deter an open communist aggression in Asia. It viewed that only a deterrent military action, preferably one co-ordinated among the Allies, would help in containing communism not only in Asia but in other parts of the world too. Hence came the prompt American reaction of appealing to the United Nations and taking up arms under the auspices of the international body.

The American action in the Korean crisis had its immediate implications for the American policy in more than one direction. For the first time it integrated the European policy of the United States with its Far Eastern policy and presented a global approach to the problem of containing communism. Thereby it led to an increased emphasis on the military considerations in its relationship with European nations. It led to a strengthening of the North Atlantic Alliance and increased the military aid to the Western European nations. A major portion of the American aid to Europe under the Marshall Plan came to consist of military equipment, as contrasted with the earlier policy of stipulating that it could not be used for

military purposes. The United States also sought to strengthen the defences of Western Europe by inspiring and encouraging proposals like the Schuman Plan and Pleven Plan.[2] This need to strengthen Western Europe had its impact on the American attitude to colonial problems. The American authorities found themselves unable to bring any pressure on the European Powers in their policy towards their Asian and African colonial possessions.

Trails of Korea

The outbreak of the Korean War had a mixed reception in the French political circles. While it was welcomed by some Right and non-communist Left intellectuals as demonstrating the American firmness to fight aggression it was opposed by others on many grounds. The fear that it might develop into a full scale Far Eastern war was quite widespread in France. This would threaten the security of the French possessions still further. This section opposed increased American involvement in the Vietnamese war too. The communists and pro-communist Leftists found in the American action an exploitation of the French interests for the latter's purpose of stalling communism. These Frenchmen looked at the American aid to Indo-China as a part of the American overall strategy of the Korean crisis. The moderate and Right-wing Frenchmen foresaw in the American aid, an attempt to replace France in Indo-China. Hence towards the end of the year, the Leftists' and Moderates' opposition to the American action of intensifying the Korean War came to be combined with their opposition to the continuation of the French War in Vietnam.

However, the French authorities themselves found in the Korean War and in the increased American aid to Indo-China, a last chance to fight out their war in Vietnam and hold on to their possessions. Hold on they did for another four years thanks to the massive American aid, though this aid could make no difference to the eventual outcome of the war. It is doubtful whether France could have continued the war, especially in the prevailing French mood, beyond 1952 but for the American aid.

The United States itself viewed the war in Vietnam with grave misgivings. The Korean War helped in drawing attention to the Vietnamese issue by heightening its importance. Vietnam came to be tied up with the crusade against communism. It also emphasised the need to find a settlement to the problem, both in its political and

military ramifications, if a similar involvement of the United States were to be prevented. It was in this context that on 27 June 1950, President Harry S. Truman declared that he had "directed an acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indo-China and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces."[3] With this direction, it appeared, the United States had decided to open another front in Vietnam in its war against communism in Asia.

On 15 July a military survey mission headed by John Melby of the Department of State and Major-General Graves Erskine arrived in Saigon. Its tasks were to determine the military build-up possible in each of the countries it visited, to recommend priorities for arms shipments and to discuss the composition of the American military advisory groups which could be assigned to each country.[4] In a statement issued on 20 July, Major-General Erskine, chief of the group of American technical experts, declared that "thanks to the presence of the French Army, Indo-China is the country of S.E. Asia with the most solid military framework" and that "this fact would be taken into consideration by the U.S. Government in its allocation of military aid."[5] Perhaps it was on the basis of these recommendations that in August the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) headed by Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, was despatched to Indo-China to supervise the distribution of supplies. The first instalment of American military aid consisting mainly of military vehicles reached Indo-China on 19 August.

It was at the same time that Donald R. Heath assumed charge as the Minister Plenipotentiary of the American Legation in Vietnam. One of his first acts was to hand over equipment for 12 Vietnamese battalions at a formal ceremony in Saigon on 6 September. In August had also arrived Robert A. Blum as the head of the first Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM) of the Economic Cooperation Administration.

The United States besides undertaking economic and military measures, also sought to win the Vietnamese in a psychological warfare. On 5 August, the Department of State announced the inauguration of a Vietnamese programme by the Voice of America with a view to propagate, among other things, "the American relations with the Far East".[6] In a message to the Programme, on its inauguration on 13 August, President Truman explained the objectives

of the American economic and military aid and said the United States "looked with sympathy upon the desires of the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia for *self-government within the French Union.*"[7]

Reaction at Home on Increased Military Aid

The American policy of increased military aid to Indo-China was supported by the *New York Times* which called it a welcome change from the "small" assistance given to Vietnam hitherto and that too with "grave doubts and many reservations".[8] The *U.S. News & World Report*, a rightist weekly too pleaded for more aid to Bao Dai, who in its opinion, was not a puppet but one who fought a hard bargain for independence with the French. In its view, the war in Vietnam was an anti-communist one and as such deserved a lot of more help from the United States.[9]

The American decision to extend military aid was upheld by the military opinion too. General MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command in Korea stressed the need for such an aid to Indo-China. He told Averell Harriman in August 1950 that the United States should be more vigorous in strengthening Burma and Indo-China so as to prevent Chinese infiltration in those areas. He even suggested a Marshall Plan for Asia.[10]

The policy of extending military aid to the Bao Dai government was, however, opposed by many others. Harry B. Ellis writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, thought such aid would not really help the cause of the West as both the United States and the French were on weak grounds politically. In his view, as Bao Dai had been rejected as a leader by his own people, France and the United States should find some one better than him as their symbol and the recipient of their aid. He also stressed that only an increase in economic aid and support to the Vietnamese aspirations for independence would win them for the West.[11]

The progressive opinion in the United States too believed that the American fight against Communism could succeed in Vietnam only if it divorced itself from the French colonialism. The American support to the Bao Dai Government had not only cost the United States the Asian goodwill and hindered in rallying the nationalist opposition to Ho Chi Minh, it had also nullified whatever credit the United States might have derived by working through the United Nations in the Korean crisis. The *New Republic* pleaded for complete independence for Vietnam, aided and guaranteed by the United Nations.[12] This plea was supported by Harold R. Isaacs who

believed that an American military involvement in Indo-China would be more difficult than in Korea. He viewed that the United States could win the support of the non-Communists in Asia, if it committed itself to put an end to the French rule in Indo-China. He also proposed an American-Asian joint initiative to prevent the extension of the war by UN participation and sanction and for a UN supervised peace, followed by a "free and supervised election" for the Vietnamese to choose their own government.[13] The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) pleaded for American efforts towards putting an end to colonialism in Indo-Chlna, and to refrain from any military action.

Besides increasing the aid to Vietnam, the United States also held frequent conversations with France on the situation in Vietnam.

In September (12-14) the Foreign Ministers of the United States, Britain and France met in New York to discuss the international situation. The political, military and economic development of Vietnam too figured in these discussions. But as exchange of views were taking place, the Viet Minh launched a strong offensive against the French troops in the district of N.E. Tongking. The battle marked the beginning of a long and sustained operation by the Viet Minh compelling the French to abandon in the following months, their strongholds in the area. This was one of the severest setbacks yet received by the French at the hands of the Viet Minh and led to the evacuation of Cao Bang by the French on 3 October. The following weeks witnessed a series of defeats for the French. On 8 October came the surrender of Cao Bang or what has come to be known as the Cao Bang Disaster—one of the greatest defeats in the history of the French colonial warfare. This was followed by a series of withdrawals from other vital strategic bases, including Thatke and Langson, abandoning a huge amount of food and ammunition to the Viet Minh, in fact enough to equip a whole Viet Minh division. As a result of this month-long offensive the Viet Minh now controlled virtually the whole of the northern half of North Vietnam. Describing this French defeat Bernard Fall wrote, "The French had suffered their greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm had died at Quebec."[14] In his opinion, "for the French, the Indo-China war was lost then and there."[15]

The Cao Bang disaster gave rise to serious disquiet and anxiety in France. The French cabinet, therefore, decided on 11 October

that Prime Minister Pleven should instruct M. Moch, the French Minister of Defence who was then in Washington in connection with a discussion on American technical and financial aid for the French rearmament programme, to impress upon his American counterpart the urgency of the French situation. The French Defence Minister was instructed to stress the need for American military help for the French in Indo-China, if France were to play its expected part in the defence of Western Europe.[16] In the midst of the continued French reverses in Indo-China Franco-American conversations took place in Washington between 13 to 15 October. At the conclusion of these conversations, the Department of State announced on 17 October a speedy shipment of arms aid to France and Indo-China. The press release pointed out that out of the sums allotted by the Congress under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act for the fiscal years 1950 and 1951, about 5 billion dollars had been earmarked for military equipment to be delivered to the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Out of this latter amount, France had been assigned by far the largest single portion. It said, in addition to this one-half billion dollars had been appropriated for the Far East as military assistance. The major part of this sum would be used to provide military equipment including high bombers for the armed forces both of France and of the Associated States of Indo-China. The press release also mentioned that deliveries of equipment were being expedited and a "particulary high priority" had been assigned to Indo-China.[17] In addition to this, the United States also agreed to provide the French on an interim basis, a financial assistance of $200 million for their own increased military production.[18] It was also agreed that the future American assistance to the defence of France would be determined by discussions among the NATO members.[19] The MAAG in Indo-China too arranged to send everything the French had requested for Indo-China. Besides these assistance programmes concluded with the French, the United States signed a military aid agreement on 23 December in Saigon with Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Thus the winter of 1950 witnessed a manifold increase in the American commitment to Indo-China with a view to prevent a rapid deterioration in the French military situation. The French failures at the battle fronts presented a discouraging picture in the free world's war against communism in Asia. The United States was not only

compelled to increase its aid to France, but it also had to encourage the French to continue the war.

This anxiety about a French defeat and even withdrawal increased further as a result of the public reaction in France to the war after the Cao Bang Disaster. The war in Vietnam had come to be called the dirty war—la sale guerre. Important political sections in France opposed a continuation of the war and advocated negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. In a debate in the French National Assembly on the military situation in Indo-China on 19 October, the war was described by the Communists as "anti-constitutional". The Progressists demanded immediate negotiations with the Viet Minh as the only realistic approach. Mendes-France of the Radical Socialist Party pleaded for negotiations with Ho Chi Minh as the only alternative to a complete victory over the Viet Minh which, in his opinion, was impossible, without "three times more troops and three times more expenditure" On the other hand, the French defeat was deplored by the PRL and the Gaullists as a betrayal of the French Forces by the French Government.[20] The resulting political demoralisation and despair in France had to be arrested if the war should go on. The United States' conceding promptly to all the French requests for assistance and its acceptance of the French conditions that contributions to the NATO should in future be made not on a bilateral but on the multilateral basis, were born out of this anxiety to please the French opinion. The United States was also interested in sustaining Pleven's Government which faced many interpellations and three debates on the Indo-Chinese war alone in the National Assembly within October. In its eagerness to help the Pleven Government face the crisis, the United States Admininistration chose to override other considerations such as the state of French fiscal affairs, its solvency for a rearmament programme or even the question of French opposition to German rearmament.

The American moral and military support to the French, and the anxiety that the war should be stepped up seemed to have been born of other considerations in the Asian political scene too. In the first week of November, General MacArthur confirmed widespread rumours of Chinese intervention in the Korean War. This intervention had intensified the war and introduced a new element into the Korean crisis. It looked like expanding from a limited engagement into a full scale Asian war. It was the same period which also

witnessed the Chinese occupation of Tibet. On 28 October the Chinese troops entered into Tibet and soon occupied Lhasa by force. This further demonstrated the Chinese expansionist motives in South and South-East Asia and enhanced the need to contain communist China. As for Indo-China itself Chinese help to the Viet Minh by way of food supplies, training camps and provision of arms and ammunition had been reported from January onwards. In the course of the October fighting, the French informed that "for the first time we have had to do with an enemy perfectly armed and equipped, who have an excellent radio network and know how to co-ordinate their movements,"[21] thereby trying to prove an increased Chinese collusion and assistance in the war.

These reports of Chinese help were, however, denied by the Viet Minh who were in need of no help. These repeated rumours and reports of help from Red China were interpreted by the Viet Minh sources, as meant to cover up the help which the French were getting from various sources.[22] This made it necessary for the United States to strengthen the French resistance to the Viet Minh.

However in providing this increased military help the US Government faced a dilemma—that of reconciling the aid to Indo-China through France, to its claims of supporting complete independence for Indo-China. The Pau Agreements, concluded on 27 November between France and the three Associated States of Indo-China, helped the United States in finding a way out of this dilemma.[23] However imperfect and unsatisfactory the results were to the Vietnamese nationalists, the United States found in it the necessary justification for extending aid to the French army in Indo-China. It meant that an issue which strained the relations between Washington and Paris viz, the granting of more independence to the Vietnamese government was getting resolved, thereby facilitating an increased American military commitment. Hence the prompt welcome which Washington granted to the Pau Agreements[24]—an instance of what Joseph Buttinger calls an "almost intentional ignorance" on the part of the United States.[25] All these various factors brought the problem of Vietnam to a head and helped the United States to formulate a policy of military aid to Vietnam. But as it did so, the policy which it followed was not an American policy but a French one.

Pleven's visit to Washington and its results

One of the immediate effects of the aid was to make France

more and more dependent on the United States. It was the American inspiration if not insistence, that made the French step up its military efforts after the debacle of October 1950. Paris moved more promptly than usual and sent a survey team to Indo-China consisting of General Juin, Commander-in-Chief of the French Forces in North Africa and M. Letourneau, Minister for the Associated States, to report on the situation created by the Viet Minh offensive. A state of emergency was also proclaimed throughout Tongkin on 18 October. Following this, the French Government sought to strengthen the military and political situation by replacing the present High Commissioner and the Commander-in-Chief of the French Forces, and combining the two posts in General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, one of the triumvirate of French military forces, who had achieved fame in the Second World War. General de Lattre was given considerable latitude in the conduct of operations.

This dependence on the United States for both the Indo-Chinese and European situation was demonstrated by subsequent events. The renewed offensive in Indo-China starting from 26 December made the French seek more and more American assistance. The French were also worried about the American attitude to the war in Vietnam in view of the increasing pre-occupation of the latter with Korea. They were keen to know what the United States would do in Asia in general and in Vietnam in particular, if the Chinese intervened in Korea.

The French were also afraid that their involvement in the war in Vietnam and the consequent military weakness were costing them their central place in Western European defence. They believed that of late the United States preferred Germany as its more reliable ally in Europe. The French Government also resented its absence in the Attlee-Truman talks in December 1950 as it viewed its presence to be necessary in any major discussion on Europe or Asia.

There was also a widespread criticism in the United States at this time, of the French will to fight communism either in Europe or Asia. It was felt in official circles that in case there was a Russian invasion in Europe, very little could be expected from France by way of deploying any effective force. Hanson Baldwin, a frequent critic of French military policy, wrote that it was the French military and political policy in Vietnam which was responsible for the deteriorating situation there. He put the blame for the French failures there on the "left-handed effort" of Paris. [26]

Hence with a view to convince the American authorities of the French intention to resist communism both in Indo-China and Europe and also to stall the domestic criticism of not restraining the United States in Korea (for which purpose the British Prime Minister dashed to Washington in November-December), the French Premier Pleven undertook a trip to Washington in January 1951. This was preceded by intense efforts to make a good impression on the United States and to get more aid for Vietnam. From Saigon General de Lattre too was clamouring for more aid. He had even threatened that if the Americans did not send much help it might be necessary to invite part of the French conscript army to Indo-China.

Pleven's visit achieved a limited purpose. It cleared, to some extent, the American "misunderstanding" and even secured more aid to Indo-China; though only in return for the French agreeing to support the American motion in the Security Council of branding China as an aggressor. Pleven had also succeeded in convincing the US Government of the French decision to stay on in Vietnam and fight the Viet Minh. During the visit Pleven made a request for American and British aircraft-carriers to act in conjunction with the French forces. He succeeded in getting certain assurances from President Truman on this point.[27] Pleven also made use of his visit to expedite the delivery of end items and to expand it. The United States subsequently shipped under forced draft a great deal of equipment, mainly air equipments. In fact, virtually all heavy fighting equipment used in Vietnamese war came from the United States. The MAAG in Vietnam also acquired equipment and assistance from the American headquarters in Tokyo. This included barbed wire, napalm, ammunition and more and faster deliveries of aircraft. [28]

Pleven's visit, followed by a visit by another French dignitary, President Vincent Auriol in March-April 1951, helped in healing the strain in Franco-American relations to some extent. This was further helped by the limited French successes in the battle fronts in Vietnam under the new and inspiring leadership of General de Lattre. On 6 February, the Viet Minh were foiled in their attempt to capture Hanoi and this defeat made them resort to their guerilla tactics at least for some months to come. Coming as they did on the eve of the various hearings on Mutual Security Program, Mutual Security Act and Assignment of Ground Forces to the European Area, these events helped the spokesmen of the Department of State

in facing the Congressional criticism. The US officials could now talk boldly of a "French will to resist" and claim that there was "no substantial support for a policy of neutralism" in France. [29]

To this appreciation of the French efforts were added the rumours of active help to the Viet Minh from communist China. It was known for quite some that the Chinese were supplying the Viet Minh with war materials and equipment. However, by the beginning of 1951, it was reported that the Chinese had mobilized a sizeable force of regular troops to fight in Indo-China at short notice. This was estimated variously; a *New York Times* report estimated this at 80,000 stationed on the Indo-Chinese border and more than double this number further back at points in Yunnan, Kwangsi and Kwangking provinces.[30] These rumours gained additional strength by the reports of a Sino-Viet Minh Conference at Nanking in January. In this Conference the Russian advisers were supposed to have counselled a general Chinese offensive and encouraged an intervention by the Chinese 'volunteers' in Indo-China. The fears of a possible Chinese intervention increased further as the prospects of a ceasefire and armistice in Korea became brighter. Not only would the Chinese direct their troops from the Korean theatre to Indo-China, but might also tighten their stand in the latter as a "face saving device". This lent an urgency to the Vietnamese situation and stressed the need, more than ever, for building up a native army and rallying the political forces in Vietnam.

On the other hand the willingness of China to abandon the war in Korea and participate in negotiations were viewed as marking a change in its attitude and policy. It was interpreted that China had decided to give up, at least for the present, open warfare in Asia. This would mean the Chinese might not increase their degree of military participation in the Vietnamese war but might wage a more intense psychological and political battle. To counteract this it would not be enough if the French military effort was strengthened, but it should be accompanied by more and more Vietnamese participation both in the political and military sphere. The United States believed that only the infusion of new blood could save the Bao Dai Government in drawing the popular support away from Viet Minh. A native army with trained Vietnamese officers to lead them in the battle would, more than anything else, help in this process. General

de Lattre too believed that only the training of a native army could help in saving the situation.

The Pau Conference of 1950 had arrived at a decision regarding the strength of a native Vietnamese army. It had also resolved that the Vietnamese Emperor would assume the Supreme Command, assisted by a High Military Committee composed of French and Vietnamese political and military advisers. Hence the way was now clear for General de Lattre to undertake the task of creating such an army. A target figure of 100,000 men was fixed for 1951. On 15 July 1951, the Vietnamese Government introduced compulsory training.

However, the halting way in which the Pau Agreements came to be implemented disappointed the United States. Though efforts to raise a native army had been undertaken, they only made a slow progress. This was not only due to the lack of sufficient trained officers among the Vietnamese but also due to the fact that a good number of people were not willing to participate in the war. They were not even willing to concede that it was a Vietnamese war. The periodic trickling in of concessions by the French had not helped in removing the image of Bao Dai as a "French puppet". To this was added the French fear that it was dangerous to train and build a whole Vietnamese army as it might defect *en masse* to the Viet Minh. This fear, which was shared even by Bao Dai, made the French reluctant to raise the Vietnamese cadres beyond the rank of Major. As Dr. Dan, a friend of Bao Dai, wrote "The Vietnamese Army is without responsible leaders, without ideology, without objective, without enthusiasm, without fighting spirit, and without popular backing."[32] Gullien, the then American Consul General in Saigon, pointed out later a native army which was commanded by French officers and non-coms. did not evoke much of enthusiasm and nationalist ardour among the population.[33] The war continued to be one between the Viet Minh and the French Army, the latter backed by non-Asian officers and men, and the reinforcements coming from France.

Nor was the United States very satisfied with the progress made towards the granting of a meaningful degree of independence to the Vietnamese in foreign and domestic affairs. Though by the Pau Agreements the Indo-Chinese States were allowed to conduct their foreign relations freely, this right was severely restricted when it came to their discussions and negotiations with other countries, more

especially with the United States. In the domestic sphere too, as Gullion wrote, "the French were still unable to state unequivocally that the Indo-China states would be completely independent."[34] "If only they had handled the question of membership in the French Union the way de Gaulle finally handled it in regard to Algeria later on...", observed the then American diplomat in Saigon, "and not made it obligatory for the Associated States either to join the Union or to stay in it once they joined." The United States viewed that the Vietnamese would not be drawn to the Bao Dai Government by the dilatory approach on the part of the French and that only a well-equipped native army would inspire the Vietnamese against the Viet Minh. The American Government also resented the fact that the French kept exclusive responsibility for training the Vietnamese units and were reluctant to provide complete report on the progress and performance of the Vietnamese battalions both in training and in battle. The United States while offering aid to raise a Vietnamese unit could not have any contact with it except through the French.

The French authorities who were, possibly, well aware of the American dissatisfaction now sought to allay this. The military successes in the first half of 1951 sufficiently increased the French morale and strengthened General de Lattre's plea for more American aid. In order to impress on the American authorities that France had given the substance as well as the forms of independence to Vietnam and also to accelerate American deliveries of equipment, General de Lattre visited the United States in September 1951. His aim was to discuss the possible repercussions of an armistice in Korea and of the American withdrawal from there. He sought to impress that the French were fighting only to save Indo-China from Peking and Moscow and that they had abandoned all their colonial positions there.

The discussions at the White House, the Department of State and at the Pentagon in which besides General de Lattre, the French Foreign Minister M. Schuman too participated, seemed to have yielded successful results. On 16 September President Truman said that the French stand in Vietnam was the same as that of the United Nations in Korea.[35] On 23 September, the Departments of State and Defence in a joint statement declared that "the successful defence of Indo-China is of great importance to the defence of all

South-East Asia", and promised a re-examination of the military aid programme and a considerable improvement in deliveries.[36] It was also rumoured that a major portion of $1,000 million allocated towards military and economic aid programme for the Far East for 1951-52 might be given to Indo-China. Apart from these material achievements, the visit of de Lattre had helped in making Vietnam replace Korea as the most important theatre in the American eyes. It helped in making the latter view the French war there sympathetically. The joint statement even recognized that the policies of the United States and of France in Vietnam were not at variance.[37]

De Lattre's visit had its implications for the American attitude to the French war in Vietnam. By focussing the American attention on the war, the visit of de Lattre and of the other French dignitaries after him, made the United States give a serious consideration to the course of the war and its future. It made the United States re-think about the role of France in Vietnam and the need to reconcile with and to even advocate the continued presence of the French there.

The United States, following de Lattre's visit, resigned itself to a secondary role in Vietnam. Any hope that the United States might make an independent effort to save the Vietnamese situation both from the point of view of nationalism and communism was given up. Robert Shaplen called this "an abdication" by the United States to the French General. The persuasive and dynamic personality of General de Lattre whom Gullion compared to General MacArthur, was partly responsible for this. A man of conviction who believed himself to be a crusader against communism, de Lattre found it easy to convert the Pentagon, the Department of State and even the American press to his own view of the French role in Indo-China. As a Frenchman who resented any interference by the Americans in the Indo-Chinese affairs, de Lattre found a supporter in the pro-French, staunchly anti-communist American Minister Heath, who was keen not "to rock the boat" in Indo-China at this juncture.

The American decision not to disturb the political balance in Vietnam was perhaps born due to the developments taking place in another Asian theatre too. Following the cease-fire in Korea, the talks for a negotiated peace there had been started by now and the United States had given up, at least temporarily, any idea of unifying Korea. The war in Korea had ended without a complete victory for the United States, though it had succeeded in its aim

of keeping the North Koreans away from South Korea. The United States had therefore come to believe it would be better to allow the French to fight the war to victory with the United States itself continuing to back the French efforts by military support, rather than put any pressure on the latter and weaken their efforts. A weakening of the French efforts might mean a complete overrunning by the Viet Minh or at least a partition on the Korean model. Thus the end of 1951 witnessed an increasing stress on the defence of Vietnam as a part of the increased American military commitment of South-East Asia and the Pacific region. This led to an overshadowing of economic aid by military assistance, especially in Vietnam in the latter half of 1951.

Displaced Utility-Economic Aid

Following the American recognition of the Bao Dai Government in February 1950, the United States had extended economic aid with a view to help in stabilizing the government. A Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM) was established as a part of the Economic Assistance Act of 1950. This Agency with Robert Blum as its head, administered the ECA aid to Indo-China from the spring of 1950 to the latter half of 1951. Overlapping the activities of this agency were those of the Technical Co-operation Administration (TCA) which was established in September 1950 within the Department of State. It was a special agency to supervise all Point Four activities in their programmes in South-East Asia. In October 1951 was created the Mutual Security Administration (MSA) by the Mutual Security Act of 1951. By this Act the American economic and technical assistance programmes in South-East Asia came to be linked to military aid, and essentially economic objectives came to be closely aligned with military and political objectives like collective security and defence of the Free World. Consequently the MSA succeeded the ECA and the latter's branch in South-East Asia, viz., STEM, except in Burma and Indonesia. It even absorbed partially the activities of TCA.

The American economic aid to Indo-China especially in the period between May 1950 and October 1951, strained the relations between the United States and France. The debate on the mode of distribution of this aid was a long and bitter one. The United States when it extended the aid, was aware of various criticisms that might come up. If it extended the aid through the French, it would be

criticized as amounting to support of French colonialism. On the other hand, it also apprehended that the governments of the Associated States would not be in a position to administer this aid effectively, if it were channelled to them directly. However, the United States had hoped to act as an intermediary between the French and the Vietnamese. It had also hoped that by extending the aid, it could show to the Vietnamese population that the United States stood behind them in their fight against communism and was interested in their welfare. It was with this view that the American aid was directed to such spheres as social welfare, distribution of cloth and medicines, building of rural irrigation wells and improvement of roads. The STEM had also concerned itself with airlifting supplies to the refugees from the war zones. The United States, by these programmes which dealt directly with the people at the village level, tried to create a better understanding with the Vietnamese people and to remove the suspicions of a population which questioned the motives of any action by a westerner.

It was this very purpose which was looked at askance by the French Government. The French viewed the American aid to Vietnam as a direct threat to their own economic and political interests in this region. The French businessmen whose monopoly in Vietnamese business enterprises came to be broken by the American aid, especially in import and export activities, accused the ECA of changing the trade patterns within the French Union. A French English daily *Correfour* called it a "peaceful conquest of Indo-China by the Americans". The French were keen on American aid but without the American personnel to administer it or without its leading to any American influence there. The French regarded the presence of even 200 Americans in Vietnam to administer the aid with suspicion.

Hence the French from the beginning tried to resist any curtailment of their own effective control over Vietnam. In May 1950 when the original aid agreement was drawn up, the French had wanted a quadrilateral arrangement among the Three Associated States and themselves, with the United States playing only the role of an adviser. But the United States insisted on bilateral agreement between the United States and the governments of the three Associated States, as any American aid programme sent under the French label would have defeated the very purpose of the aid. The United States succeeded ultimately in extending the aid on a bilateral basis although it took almost 18 months to negotiate the agreement.

Again, the French also sought to hamstring the actual distribution of this aid in various ways. They sought to control all the counterpart funds as they controlled the foreign exchange of Vietnam. There was also much of wrangling over the working of the agreement, which held up the initial negotiations for a formal agreement for more than two months in the summer of 1951. General de Lattre also believed no economic aid would do any good to the Indo-Chinese unless it was co-ordinated with the French military effort. It was finally in September 1951 that the Agreement was formally signed between the United States and the Indo-Chinese states, but by now the United States Administration had already decided on a Mutual Security Programme which sought to co-ordinate the economic aid schemes to the military assistance programmes, and de Lattre could cable to Bao Dai from Washington that "he had persuaded the Americans to see the light."[38]

The continuing strain in the Franco-American relations on the nature and distribution of economic aid frustrated the efforts of Robert Blum, whom de Lattre described as "the most dangerous man in Indo-China". Blum who returned to Washington in winter 1951, expressed his doubts as to whether the American aid achieved anything in "almost two years of active American participation in the affairs of Indo-China". On the one hand, he wrote, the United States was not able to reconcile the two allies, i.e. the French and the Vietnamese in a common fight against communism. On the other hand, the American actions in Vietnam had only helped in strengthening the French military position. The United States was content to let the French continue to have primary responsibility and was disposed not to get embroiled directly, beyond giving advice. Hence the American presence had only disappointed the Vietnamese who felt the United States was not prepared to make any undiluted effort to support their point of view.[39] Whatever little results the direct economic programme could have achieved psychologically was also nullified by the simultaneous military aid that the United States extended to the French. Blum wrote later in 1965, "on balance we came to be looked upon more as a supporter of colonialism than as a friend of the new nation." [40] The return of Blum to Washington could be regarded to some extent as marking a change in American policy, viz., the substitution of economic aid by more of military assistance as the more effective way of combating communism in Vietnam.

In the beginning of 1952 the Vietnamese situation became grave and depressing for the French. The era of General de Lattre de Tassigny came to an end with his death on 11 January. This was a severe blow to the French morale. The French Government was faced with the task of maintaining the French resolve to continue the fighting and of reassuring the American opinion. This became especially difficult as the French forces were facing a continuing winter offensive from the Viet Minh. The fighting which had started in October 1951 was initially favourable to the French, but resulted in the French withdrawal from Hoa Binh by the end of February. This war also demonstrated, more than ever, the degree to which the French depended on the American arms and equipment. It was with the napalm bomb and aircraft supplied by the United States, that the French had fought this battle.

The task of the French also became more difficult by fears and rumours of direct intervention by the Chinese on the side of the Viet Minh. In the beginning of 1952, the Chinese regular forces available immediately for the Viet Minh, were estimated at 200,000 to 300,000 as against 80,000 a few months earlier. It was rumoured in December 1951 that Russian, Chinese and Viet Minh military leaders met in northern Tongking, that the Chinese could be expected to intervene in January or February and that the communication links between China and Tongking were being increased. By March, the rumours had gained additional currency and it was reported that the Chinese were even fighting along with the Viet Minh in the Red River delta. Though these rumours of Chinese intervention were denied by the French Government, the American Government seemed to have been taken in by them for some time. On 19 and 21 March, Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, and Robert Lovett, Secretary of Defence told the Foreign Affairs Committee that the Chinese were actively assisting the Viet Minh. The whole of 1952 witnessed repeated rumours of Chinese intervention and a continuing speculation of the extent of their help to the Viet Minh. The Chinese help was believed to be not only in terms of arms and equipment, but also textile and rice-milling machinery and equipment for telecommunications. They were also believed to have undertaken to train and organize the Viet Minh units. The French, however, believed that the Chinese might not intervene as this might invite American participation on the other side.

The fears of a Chinese intervention helped the French in getting the British and American sympathy and even possible support.

It strengthened their argument that the Vietnamese war was not a colonial one but a part of the world-wide front against communism. The French also used the opportunity to acquire more resources and aid from the United States and to enlarge the Western commitment in Vietnam. On 10 January, General Juin, Chief of the French General Staff arrived in the United States for a conference with Gen. Omar Bradley of United States and Field Marshal Sir William Slim of Great Britain. The French General sought some form of a Western alliance based on a common strategy for South-East Asia, which would be linked to the NATO. If this were not possible, France was eager to get a military commitment from the United States on the model of the ANZUS Treaty. At any rate France was keen to get the United States to promise an intervention in case of a Chinese invasion of Vietnam. The French also toyed, at this time, with the idea of referring the Vietnamese situation to the United Nations, if the Chinese intervened on the side of the Viet Minh.[41]

General Juin's efforts were not however very successful in getting a firm and clear commitment on the part of the United States. The United States, after its experience in the Korean crisis, preferred to continue with the bilateral basis of its aid. It was also more cautious in lending its support for a UN intervention. It felt that even in the case of a Chinese participation, it would not feel free to offer more than some air and naval support.[42]

However, General Juin succeeded in focussing the American and British attention on the movements of the Chinese on the Indo-Chinese borders and in getting expressions of solidarity not only from the United States, but from Britain too. On 11 January the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, even though more sceptical than the French on the probability of Chinese intervention, issued a public warning to Peking. He said such a situation would invite a UN intervention on the model of Korea.[43] The United States followed suit. On 28 January Sherman Cooper, the American delegate to the United Nations declared in the General Assembly that any "communist aggression in South-East Asia would...be a matter of direct and grave concern which would require the most urgent and earnest consideration by the United Nations."[44] General Juin's visit also led to a closer co-ordination of the efforts of the three Powers in South-East Asia. The military committee established in Washington, following the meeting of the three Chiefs of Staff, continued to meet and co-ordinate the efforts of the three Powers.

The French also increased their pressure on the United States for more aid, both for continuing the war and to strengthen their own army at home. The French continued to complain of delays in the despatch of American aid promised earlier. This was, however, refuted by Brigadier-General Francis Brink.[45] The scale of the American aid in terms of various arms and equipments had increased considerably and was estimated at the value of $300 million by January 1952.

On 5 March the tenth assignment of B-26 bombers arrived in Vietnam, thereby tripling the French air-power there. By the end of May, the 150th shipload of American military material had been unloaded at Saigon. By June the American contribution to the war approximated one-third of the total cost of the Vietnamese operations.

Europe Comes First

The increasing American military commitment to Vietnam in the fall of 1951, could also be traced to the developments in Europe, more especially to the formation of the European Defence Community.

In the latter part of 1950, the United States began viewing that Western Europe could not be defended from a communist expansion except with the West German help and participation. This would not be possible without the rearmament of West Germany and restoration of normalcy to that State. This conviction of the United States, as opposed to the doubts and misgivings of England and France of the wisdom of rearming Germany, was further affirmed after the outbreak of the Korean War. In September 1950, the United States succeeded in securing the reluctant consent of Britain and France which adopted the policy in principle. Towards the end of October the French Prime Minister Pleven put forth a proposal which came to be known as the Pleven Plan, for the creation of a European Army to which Germany would contribute relatively small units. The Pleven Plan sought to reconcile the French fears of a rearmed Germany with the American insistence of making the Germans participate in the defence of Western Europe. The whole of 1951 witnessed a series of parallel conferences to discuss the two sets of proposals—one by the Pleven Plan to create a European Army and

the other to decide the extent and mode of German rearmament with a view to contribute to the defence of Western Europe. The two parallel discussions led in July 1951, to a proposal to form a European Defence Community with a constitution providing for a Defence Commissioner, a Committee of Ministers, an Assembly and an army of 20 divisions. The size of national units to be contributed by the members, however, could not be agreed upon. During the rest of 1951, discussions continued on formulating the details of EDC. In the process, the Pleven Plan had not only been considerably altered but the whole French diplomatic position came to be undermined and overshadowed by the American moves. By the end of 1951 the governments of principal Western allies were inescapably committed to Germany's rearmament. This could be done only through a European army as a part of the EDC. The conclusion of EDC thus became a keystone of the Western policies.

The EDC was an issue which created violent reactions in the French political scene. It lay dormant during the French elections in June-July 1951 but got revived after August 1951. Public opinion grew restive as the American pressure on France became more insistent. While it divided the Socialist ranks, the Rightist Parties like the R.P.T. viewed the EDC as leading to the creation of a German Army. They criticized the Government's "slavish" policy *vis-a-vis* the United States. In this they were joined by the communists who opposed the building of American air bases in France and started a virulent anti-American campaign.

This French scare of a rearmed Germany and their opposition to an American dominated European Army came to be linked up with the war in Vietnam. The anti-American propaganda in France at this time was intensified by the Henri Martin affair. Henri Martin was a French sailor who, revolted by what he had seen in Vietnam, had joined the communists. When the French Government arrested him, his cause was taken up by the communists in order to prove the nature of the war in Vietnam. There were others like Mendes-France who continued to voice their opposition to the war. In a famous speech on 30 December which received nation-wide attention, he argued that so long as France continued to fight the war in Vietnam, it would not be able to organize national defence in Europe. He accused the French Government of promising to the United States, to build a strong French Army and make its contribution to the European defence, without looking into its

resources. This would result in heavy military expenditure and inflation. Mendes-France who believed Europe should be given priority over Asia, argued that the situation could improve o nly if France put an end to the war in Vietnam and negotiated with the Viet Minh.

This speech of Mendes-France which was approved widely in France inaugurated a serious debate on negotiations with the Viet Minh. It had thrown open an alternative to solve the present economic and military crisis in France. An anonymous French General writing in *Le Monde* pleaded for a halt in the war as the only way to save the French position in Europe and Africa. He argued if the United States could arrive at guarantees by negotiating on a national basis with the communists in Korea, why should France not a dopt a similar strategy.[46] The French were also convinced that the United States and other allies of France could not be expected to extend anything more than an indirect support, even if the war were to intensify or the Chinese intervene. Nor did the hope of a native Vietnamese army relieving the French forces, seem to be materializing in the near future. In the face of the popular restiveness even the MRP leaders, who were responsible for the Indo-China policy, now had to keep the doors open for negotiation. In January 1952, Robert Schuman, a former Minister, declared at a meeting of MRP supporters that "if an armistice can be concluded on honourable terms, France will not hesitate to make peace."[47]

On the other hand there were other Frenchmen who welcomed the American interest in the Vietnamese war and the latter's insistence on the French participation in the European Army. In their view the war was a diplomatic asset for France as the latter came to be treated with some regard in all international discussions. France was fighting a war for the "Free Democracies" as against the communist Viet Minh and hence would have to be consulted in all political and military considerations of the West. It also gave France considerable leverage in resisting the American pressure especially in matters like the European Army and German rearmament.

However, on the whole, the French were quite weary of anything "European" and were demoralised at the fact that "everything is [was] decided in Washington".[48] To this weariness was added an anti-Americanism born out of the American criticism of the French conduct of military operations and of its reluctance to rearm and contribute its strength to the EDC. The *New York Times* of 10

December called France as the "worst straggler of all,"[49] while Hanson Baldwin believed if there was going to be no European Army, it would be necessary to build up a German national army.[50] Such critics, however, were not ready to concede Mendes-France's plea that France could contribute more to the European defence build-up only if it withdrew from Vietnam. A more vigorous leadership, a better development and exploitation of the French military potential, in their view, were the only needs of the situation. This would not only help in waging the war more successfully but would enable France to maintain the schedule of its promised military development in Europe.

The official view in the United States, however, conceded that it was a "grievous burden" on France to continue the war in Vietnam in view of the heavy casualties and military expenditure,[51] and that this might raise some problems for the future when the need for forces in the West become greater. But this still did not imply, in the American governmental view, that the French should withdraw from the war. It considered that a French withdrawal would be a disaster. It did not want to recognize that a powerful section of French opinion was in favour of withdrawal. The United States desired a continuation of the war by the French as it was in favour of France carrying the baby, in the absence of its own willingness to fight on the continent of Asia. In February 1952 a conference was held at Lisbon in which the various Powers arrived at a decision on each member-nation's contribution to the EDC. The French contribution was fixed at 12 divisions, 27 squadrons and 456, 000 tons of naval shipping. This meant France would have to pass a defence budget of 1,400,000 million francs of which 195,000 million francs would be covered by American economic aid and off-shore procurements. But even with this assistance, in accepting such a big military commitment the Faure Government was actually playing a gamble. The French financial position would not have permitted building this much of military strength. Their only hope was substantial American aid in addition to the one which had already been pledged. On 5 February, the United States proposed to allot to France a sum of $100,000,000 from a total amount of $478,160,000 that was transferred from the military assistance of the Mutual Security Act of 1951 to economic assistance for some European countries. The counterpart funds accruing from such assistance were to be used by the French Government for procuring supplies for the campaign in Vietnam.[52]

However the signing of the EDC Treaty on 26 May in Bonn complicated matters for the French Government. On the eve of its signing the French cabinet decided to make it a conditional signature —that France would not sign the treaty unless there was a greater Anglo-American guarantee against a German withdrawal and that it would not present the agreement for ratification to the National Assembly unless France obtained larger orders for off-shore purchases and more support for its efforts in Indo-China and its policies in North Africa. Hence following the signing of the Treaty, there was a tripartite meeting among the three Foreign Ministers, of France, the United States and the United Kingdom on 28 and 29 May. The French Foreign Minister M. Schuman heading a French delegation of six of his colleagues presented the case for increased aid to Indo-China and moral support in North Africa. He argued that France would not be able to play its part in Europe if it were weakened by the war in Vietnam. France also asked for increased off-shore purchasing on the ground that the military credits for the coming year would be entirely absorbed by the war in Vietnam and its own contribution to the European Army. The French delegation also warned that unless these conditions were fulfilled, the National Assembly might not ratify the EDC. Though the Communique issued at the end of the Conference made no mention of the conclusions, it was understood that the United States and Britain recognized that "France represented a veritable pillar of defence in South-East Asia" and that the French withdrawal would involve grave consequences not only for Malaya, Singapore and India, but even for Japan.[53]

The American position, however, left the French dissatisfied. The governmental dissatisfaction was augmented by popular criticism of the EDC Treaty. The annual budget for the Vietnamese war also had to come up before the French National Assembly in August. The French Government, before presenting the Budget was eager to discuss an increase in the American aid. Hence the United States invited Letourneau, the French Minister for Associated States to visit Washington to discuss the American aid.

M. Letourneau who arrived in New York on 11 June, had many tasks to perform in Washington. He had to dispel the fear that France was contemplating a withdrawal from the war. He had to convince the United States that the French had developed a Vietnamese army, that

this army would need every kind of equipment and not merely weapons and that France had granted real independence to the Associated States and was fighting only a selfless anti-communist war. M. Letourneau also tried to reconcile the two obviously contradictory positions of France in Vietnam. In Paris he had tried to placate his critics, who demanded a withdrawal from Vietnam, on the plea that such a withdrawal "might by casting doubts on French reliability cause a change in American policy in Europe."[54] But now in Washington he sought to assure the American Administration that "any (French) government that proposed pulling out of Indo-China would be overthrown immediately."[55]

Letourneau seemed to have succeeded on the whole, in painting an encouraging picture both of the French intentions and the military situation. The United States was convinced that "much has been accomplished toward the creation, training and equipping of the national armies" and that the Vietnamese were well on their way to control their own defence. The United States was also disposed to believe that the tide in Vietnam was moving in France's favour, and to expect "continued favourable developments in the maintenance and consolidation of the free world bulwark in Indo-China".[56] As a result of this visit, the United States recognized that "the struggle in which the forces of the French Union and the Associated States are engaged against the forces of communist aggression in Indo-China is an integral part of the world-wide resistance by the Free Nations" and that while the United States assumed a large share of the burden in Korea, France had the primary role in Indo-China.[57] Following this recognition of the French role, the United States agreed to increase its aid to the French Union, "within the limitations set by the Congress" for the specific purpose of "assisting France in the building of the national armies of the Associated States."[58]

Though no specific figure of the proposed aid was given in this communique, one newspaper estimated it as an increase from $300 million to $450 million.[59] According to another estimate by the French Minister himself the American aid was expected to increase during the next six months until it represented 40 per cent instead of the present 33 per cent of total expenditure in Indo-China.[60] This would, according to the Vietnamese Premier, Nguyen Van Tam enable setting up two further divisions of the Vietnamese army. In return the French undertook to use this additional aid to build up the national armies of the Associated States.

In spite of this success, Letourneau's visit, like the earlier visit of Gen. Juin, failed in getting a definite commitment on the part of the United States to come to the help of the French forces in case of a Chinese invasion. The United States was still unwilling to form a common Western military front in South-East Asia, nor had the United States developed any plan for meeting a Chinese intervention in Vietnam. On the other hand, the communique clearly recognized some sort of a sphere of influence for the United States and France in Asia, and put Indo-China as "an area of specific responsibility" of France while Korea was its own. All that the United States recognized was an obligation "to help each other in their areas of primary responsibility."[61] In the coming months even though there were increasing consultations among the representatives of the three Powers, these conferences did not lead to any pact or alliance. The utmost the French could arrive at by way of a western front was the expression by the North Atlantic Council on 17 December "of its wholehearted admiration for the valiant and long continued struggle by the French forces and the armies of the Associated States against communist aggression." It recognized that the French "resistance" was similar to the Korean war and was "in fullest harmony with the aims and ideas of the Atlantic Community" and that it deserved "continuing support from the NATO governments."[62] Even this resolution, however, did not specify the form which this support should take and was only in the nature of a concession to the repeated French appeals for recognition of the war in Vietnam. The NATO resolution was, however, interpreted in Paris as involving some kind of a positive material aid. This caused misgivings especially in the Asian circles. It was interpreted to mean that the NATO countries had made it their collective concern to protect the interests of any one of them in any part of the world. It meant NATO was no longer a regional pact but a global one and one which could even support a colonial power.

The Truman Administration which had concluded various treaties concerning the Pacific region like the Japanese Peace Treaty, ANZUS Pact and the Treaty with the Philippines was reluctant to enter into any Asian Pact on the model of NATO. The United States was repeatedly approached for such a Pact by some of its Western allies like France and even by some Asian allies like the Philippines and South Korea. The United States felt such a pact for Asia may not be feasible as the Asian countries differed from one another in their

political, social and economic development. These countries also differed in their attitude towards communism and their policy towards China. They further differed in their attitude to and role in the ideological struggle—a question that was fundamental to the United States. The United States felt that in such a situation there could not be a single Pacific Pact similar to the Atlantic Pact.[63] The idea of a Pact, as advocated enthusiastically by the Philippines' President Quirino, was also opposed by many non-aligned nations like India, Indonesia and Burma. The United States viewed that if these Asian countries did not participate, the Pact would comprise only of Western Powers like the United States, Great Britain and France which had their interests in South-East Asia. This would bring in criticism of neo-colonialism and play up the communist propaganda. Besides, the United States was reluctant to get into more and more commitments in South-East Asia. This was an important reason why the United States sought to keep Britain out of the ANZUS Pact, even at tne risk of causing strains in the Anglo-American relations. The United States feared that if the British joined the ANZUS Pact it might mean guaranteeing the security of Hongkong and Malaya, a commitment which the United States was reluctant to undertake. The United States was also afraid that it might be followed by a flood of applications from France, the Philippines and other Asian countries. In the absence of any neutral Asian nation joining it, it might become a "white dominated organization". The United States in 1952 was unwilling to participate in such a pact, even though she did so two years later, under the Eisenhower Administration.

The United States. therefore, decided that the "time was not ripe" for a Pacific Pact, though it repeatedly avowed that it would join any such Pact, if the initiative was taken by the Asian countries. Meanwhile the United States was content to have a piecemeal approach, dealing with each situation on a local basis and arriving at bilateral agreements with the countries concerned on the various political, military and economic issues.

Sacred Cow of United Nations

Another important aspect of the Vietnamese war which was widely discussed during this period was a possible solution to the dispute by referring it to the United Nations Organization. This sug-

gestion had been put forward at various times by various individuals. It was first mooted by Ho Chi Minh himself as early as the beginning of 1947.

With the recognition of the two Governments by the various countries in 1950, the Vietnamese dispute could not be kept any longer as a French preserve and the issue came to be transferred to an international plane. The UN action in the Korean crisis opened the way for proposals for a similar solution to the Vietnamese war too. The slow progress of the Pau Conference in the second half of 1950 and the French attitude to the formation of the Vietnamese National Army, caused dissatisfaction and irritation among the Vietnamese. Some Vietnamese leaders advocated at this stage a mediation by the United Nations in the bilateral negotiations which seemed to be leading nowhere. The Cao Bang disaster once again brought up the question of involving the United Nations in solving the crisis; this time it was a move from a section of the French public opinion. The French failure at the battle front led to a chorus of disapproval of the war in the nation. This was reflected in a debate in the National Assembly. Members belonging to various political parties like the Communists, Socialists, Radical Socialists and the Progressives advocated a solution to the dispute and withdrawal from Indo-China. While Mendes-France advocated direct negotiations with the Viet Minh and and was opposed to internationalising the War, Daniel Mayer (Socialist) thought it had already become an international issue. He suggested that France should approach the United Nations to solve it. M. Daladier of the Radical Socialist Party recommended on the other hand "an internationalisation of the political problem, not of the conflict" under the United Nations. M. Paul Coste-Floret (MRP) a former Minister of Overseas France, also advocated the admission of Vietnam to the United Nations followed by discussion of conditions of peace among the thirty-two nations which had recognized Vietnam. This would mean "internationalizing the solution of the conflict".[64]

This increasing demand for referring the issue to the United Nations found its echo in the United States. Senator Owen Brewster (Republican, Maine) advocated such a reference, not so much to solve the question, as much as to exploit the alleged Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh as an aggressive act that would block the former's admission to the United Nations.[65] The Progressive opinion in the United States as reflected by the writings in the *New*

Republic advocated a UN mediation in the dispute and an international guarantee for Indo-China's future.

On the other hand, another section in the United States opposed any such reference to the United Nations. The *New York Times* which had all along pleaded for strong American action to refer the issue to the United Nations changed its view after the outbreak of the Korean War. It thought that to refer the crisis to the United Nations would be "to drop it like a hot brick into the lap of the United Nations".[66] It considered that the responsibility was France's alone and that the United Nations could not intervene in the struggle against communism. It felt it was better to pin down China to one spot, namely Korea by continuing and strengthening the UN action there, rather than making the United Nations fight another battle in Vietnam.[67]

The official opinion in the United States too opposed the reference of the issue to the United Nations on more than one ground. Dean Rusk thought that the United Nations was already doing its maximum against a communist "aggression" in Korea. To give it an additional responsibility by placing the case of Vietnam before it, might be straining it further. It might also be resisted by many of its members.[68] The American reluctance to take any initiative in this regard was also born due to other factors. Such a move would immediately bring forth the question as to what the United States would be prepared to do within the United Nations for Vietnam, a question which, in the American opinion, required considerable thought. The strong public reaction inside the nation to the American involvement in Korea, the opposition to sending any more troops abroad and the disillusionment of the United States regarding the allies' support in the Korean War which had practically turned out to be an American affair rather than a UN action, had deterred the American authorities from taking any initiative regarding Vietnam. This objection had been spearheaded by no less a person than Senator Knowland (Republican, California) who thought the Korean precedent was a bad one for the United States to repeat, as the latter's contribution to the war effort was 90 per cent while that of the rest of the allies was only 10 per cent.

Nor did the Truman Administration feel that the Vietnamese question could be used to block communist China's admission to the United Nations. In the opinion of Dean Rusk, the question of

Chinese aggression in the form of assistance was "a nebulous issue ...which would be more difficult to prove".[69] The United States also viewed that due to the mixing up of the colonial issue in the Vietnamese question, many of the non-European members might react in an entirely opposite way. The Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, however, did not rule out the possibility of referring the question to the United Nations at some future date. Its timing would however depend on other considerations like the nature of the proof the United States had to brand China an aggressor, and the action other members were prepared to take.

The United States was also concerned with the possible reaction its actions might create in Paris. For, while France was eager and anxious to receive all possible military assistance from the United States it was reluctant to internationalise the conflict. In spite of the heavy burden that the war imposed on its weak financial and military resources, France was keen not to let the initiative for war or peace pass on even to the international organization as this would reduce its position to a contingent or at the most an agent of the UN army. Nor did France want to be replaced, in any sense, by the United States to which the Vietnamese might be beholden in the future. Hence the United States viewed that a reference to the United Nations should be made by France and/or the Associated States, rather than by the United States. Rusk expected that such a reference might come if there were "organised attacks from across the Chinese frontier".[70]

However the intense rumours of an imminent Chinese intervention in the beginning of 1952 put the question of UN action in a different light. Though France was still reluctant to internationalise the war, it modified its stand to the extent that an active Chinese invasion might make the French change their attitude.[71] France's allies too warned the Chinese on the consequences of an invasion. However, these statements of both the British Foreign Secretary and the American Delegate to the General Assembly, were not followed by any definite decision or even proposals by the Western Powers to bring the Indo-Chinese issue to the United Nations. In the absence of any such follow-up action, these various statements at the most could be interpreted only as a warning and an attempt to forestall a Chinese invasion rather than a policy decision towards the solution of the crisis by the Western Powers.

SUMMARY

The two and a half years of Truman Administration after the outbreak of the Korean War was a period which witnessed an increasing American commitment in the Vietnamese crisis. Starting with economic assistance it became more and more, as the year 1950 went by, one of military commitment. With talks for armistice in Korea having started, the Vietnamese War was the only real war which was still going on in Asia. This gave it an additional importance and helped the French in acquiring more material assistance and support. It also raised hopes of a French victory over the Viet Minh forces.

By the time the Eisenhower Administration took over, the United States was committed to the war to the extent of 40 per cent of the total expenditure. This depth of military involvement meant logically an eagerness to bring the war to a successful close.

The vagaries at the battlefront for the French forces, however, seemed to thwart this hope of the United States. This had raised doubts about the United States, intervention in Vietnam on the side of the French or its seeking the UN's help for the same. After its experience in the Korean crisis and the public opposition at home, the Truman Administration was unwilling to enter into another adventure in Vietnam. Hence it meant more and more assistance to keep the French going and reach their objective.

The period also witnessed the interplay of three different factors in Vietnam—the American opposition to communism, its opposition to French colonial rule and the need to build up Western European defence necessitating an amicable relationship with France. On the whole, the need to fight communism in both Europe and Asia gained priority over the granting of complete independence to the Vietnamese. The French presence and even the French control over military operations were recognized as being indispensable, if the French military expenditure and American assistance programmes were not to become infructuous. The need to conclude the European Defence Community at the earliest also made the United States compromise with the situation. One may conclude, the real beginnings of an American policy towards the Vietnamese crisis were made on the conclusion of the Korean War. The subsequent years, either of the Truman Administration or of the Eisen hower period, witnessed only an implementation of this policy, leading to deeper and wider involvement in the crisis.

FOOTNOTES

1. George C. Marshall, Secretary of Defense in a testimony, U. S., Senate, 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, *Military Situation in the Far East* (Washington, D. C., 1951), pp. 432 and 437. Also Senator Tom Connally (Republican, Texas) in a statement on American foreign policy presented to the Senate on 22 September 1950, advocated this point of view. U.S., *Congressional Record* (Washington, D. C.), vol. 96, col. 15761. John Foster Dulles, then the consultant to the Secretary of State seemed to agree with this view. *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D. C.), vol. 23, 7 August 1950, p. 208. Hereafter referred to as *Bulletin*. Dean Rusk, then Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, gave expression to these various doubts and conjectures in a speech on 15 November 1950.
2. The Schuman Plan put forward by the French Foreign Minister M. Schuman on 9 May 1950 sought to integrate the coal and steel industries of France and Germany as the first step towards a European economic federation. In the latter half of 1950 was put forward the Pleven Plan, another French proposal to form a strong European Army with German participation. It is dealt with in greater detail later.
3. Ibid., p. 5.
4. John Kerry King, *Southeast Asia in Prespective* (New York, 1959), p. 134.
5. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives 1950-1952* (Bristol, 1952), pp. 11000-10.
6. *Bulletin*, n. 1, p. 287.
7. *New York Times* 14 August 1950. Emphasis added.
8. Ibid., 3 July 1950.
9. "Must we fight another Korean War ?", ed., *U.S. News & World Report* (Washington, D.C.), 3 November 1950, pp. 22-23.
10. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs : Years of Trial and Hope 1946-52* (New York, 1956), vol. 2, p. 353.
11. Harry B. Ellis, "Dilemma in Indo-China; Is U.S. at the End of its Role ?", *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 10 September 1950; and "What Does Communism Mean to Asia's Millions ?" ibid., 21 September 1950.
12. "To Put Our Own House in Order", ed., *New Republic* (New York), 10 July 1950, pp. 5-6. Again "The Choice in Indo-China" ed., ibid., 30 October 1950, p. 5.
13. Harold R. Isaacs, "Korea and American World Policy", *New Republic*, 7 August 1950, p. 16.
14. Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy : Indo-China at War, 1946-54* (Harisburg Pa., 1961), p. 28.
15. Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Vietnams, a Political and Military Analysis* (London, 1963), p. 111.
16. Peter Calvocoressi, *Survey of International Affairs 1949-1950* (London, 1953), p. 440.
17. *Bulletin*, n. 1, p. 704.
18. Ibid. According to a French statement, this would amount to 40 per cent of the total sum voted by the Congress under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act.

19. Ibid.
20. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, n. 5, p. 11047.
21. In a communiqe by the French Government, *Le Monde*, 12 October 1950, as cited by Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indo-China* (London, 1961), p. 219.
22. *Vietnam Information* (Rangoon), 17 November 1950, p. 11.
23. The Pau Conference started on 29 June 1950 to negotiate details of Indo-Chinese independence and to discuss a variety of "technical problems". Among other things, it agreed on the creation of a native army for Vietnam. The details of the agreement and the reaction of the Vietnamese are dealt with in Chapter I.
24. Dean Acheson's statement on 27 November 1950. See *Bulletin*, n. 1, p. 940 ; and a statement by Donald Heath on 4 February 1951, *Bulletin*, vol. 24, 12 February 1951, p. 262.
25. Joseph Buttinger, "The Miracle of Vietnam", in Richard W. Lindholm, ed., *Vietnam, The First Five Years* (East Lansing, 1959), p. 27.
26. Hanson Baldwin, "The Crisis in Indo-China", *New York Times*, 5 January 1951.
27. *The Hindu* (Madras), 1 February 1951.
28. General H.J. Malony, Department of Defense Representative, S.-E. Asia Policy Co-ordinating Committee, in a testimony, U.S., House of Representatives, 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, *The Mutual Security Program* (Washington, D.C. 1951), p. 900. This aid, though not much, helped considerably in the French victory in Vinh Yen when the napalm bomb was used for the first time in this war. This aid was specifically acknowledged by General de Lattre. *New York Times*, 24 January 1951.
29. John Sherman Cooper, Adviser to the Secretary of State in a testimony, U.S., Senate 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Hearings, *Assignment of Ground Forces of of the United States to Duty in the European Area* (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 578
30. *New York Times*, 12 January 1951.
32. Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution : Vietnam 1945-1965* (London, 1966), p. 78.
33. Ibid., p. 85.
34. Ibid., p. 77.
35. *New York Times*, 15 September 1951.
36. *Bulletin*, n. 1, vol. 25, 8 October 1951, p. 570.
37. Ibid.
38. Shaplen, n. 32, p. 90.
39. In a private memorandum, as cited by Shaplen, ibid., pp. 90-91.
40. Ibid., p. 89.
41. Gen. Juin in a statement, *Le Figaro* (Paris), 11 January 1952; also M. Letourneau, the French Minister for the Associated States in a statement, *Le Monde*, 26 January 1952.
42. *New York Times*, 9 January 1952.
43. Ibid., 14 January 1952.

44. Richard P. Stebbins, *The United States in World Affairs, 1952* (New York, 1953), pp. 177-8.
45. *New York Times*, 12 January 1952.
46. As cited by *The Hindu*, 17 March 1952.
47. As cited by Lancaster, n. 21, p. 240.
48. The French paper *Espirit* in November 1951 gave a long description of the factors of this demoralisation. As cited by Alexander Werth, *France 1940-1955* (London, 1956), p. 554.
49. *New York Times*, 10 December 1951.
50. Hanson W. Baldwin, "Troops for Indo-China", ibid., 23 March 1951, pp. 3, 47.
51. Gen. Malony in a testimony, U.S., House of Representatives, 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, *The Mutual Security Program* (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 925.
52. *Bulletin*, vol. 26, 25 February 1952, p. 318.
53. Peter Calvocoressi, *The Survey of International Affairs 1952* (London, 1955), p. 122.
54. *New York Times*, 13 March 1952.
55. *New York Herald Tribune*, 12 June 1952.
56. Secretary Acheson in a Press Conference statement on 18 June. *Bulletin*, n. 52 pp. 1009-10.
57. In a communique issued on 18 June. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. *New York Herald Tribune*, 20 June 1952.
60. *Combat* (Paris), 26 June 1952.
61. *Bulletin*, n. 56, p, 1010. Bernard Fall, however, talks of an agreement between the two allies that the two theatres of war were interdependent and that neither would conclude a peace without the other. The United States, under this agreement, exerted strong pressure on the French not to pursue the peace feelers extended to the Viet Minh in 1952. The French even had to hurriedly recall a delegation consisting of Raphael Leygres, a member of the French Assembly and Prince Buu-Hoi of Vietnam, which had proceeded to meet the Viet Minh negotiators in Rangoon. Fall, however, does not specify any date or occasion when such an agreement was arrived at. In this context, Fall calls the American action of concluding a Korean cease-fire in July 1953, as "a breach of faith"; it "literally threw the whole burden of the Chinese war-making potential on the side of the Viet Minh and against the French", he added. Fall, n. 15, pp. 122-4. The present writer, however, has not come across any information to confirm or deny the existence of such an agreement.
62. For the text of the resolution, see Denise Folliot, ed., *Documents on International Affairs 1952* (London, 1955), p. 502.
63. John M. Allison, Asstt. Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs over television, *Bulletin*, vol. 27, 29 September 1952, p. 472.
64. As cited in Calvocoressi, n. 53, p. 410.
65. U.S., Senate, 12 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Hearings, *Mutual Security Act of 1951* Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 542.
66. "Indo-China in Danger", ed., *New York Times*, 17 October 1950.

67. "Three Fronts in Asia", ed., ibid., 11 April 1951, p. 28.
68. U.S., Senate, 82 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Hearings, *Mutual Security Act of 1951* (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 76.
69. Ibid., p. 542.
70. Ibid., p. 567.
71. M. Letourneau in a statement in January 1952, Calvocoressi, n. 53. p. 409.

V

Spider and the Web

The Republican Administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated on 20 January, 1953 in the midst of a war which the United States was still waging in far away Korea. It was widely believed that the change in the Administration might have significant implications for American foreign policy in general and the Korean War in particular, In fact the 1952 presidential campaign had centred around foreign policy issues and was dominated by the great debate as to how to bring the Korean War to an honourable end. While there was general approval of the need to check communist expansion, the Eisenhower-Dulles plank had questioned the effectiveness of the containment policy of the Truman Administration. It had instead talked in terms of liberation of the people under communist rule—a positive policy to create and invite resistance and rebellion behind the Iron Curtain and to promote disintegation from within by diplomacy and by means of propaganda.

The hot war with the communists in Korea made this new approach particularly relevant to the Asian situation. The campaign helped to focus public attention

on the Asian situation especially in the Far East and South-East Asia. The Republican campaign put forward, in this context, another slogan "Let Asians fight the Asians". It was interpreted to mean that a Republican Administration would oppose the use of American ground troops in Asian wars, but would work toward stengthening Asia so as to enable it to defend itself. The new Administration, when it was inaugurated, appeared to have been committed to a forward policy in Asia even if it meant playing down Europe.

The return of the Republican Party to the White House after a lapse of two decades was interpreted as a "mandate for change" in American foreign policy rather than as just a personal triumph of General Eisenhower. It was viewed as supporting an end to the existing war and a new and more positive approach to "international communism". The choice of John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State showed that the new President was serious about the implementation of the election platforms.

However the election of Eisenhower who not long ago was the Supreme Commander of NATO forces and had an indirect hand in the formulation of Truman's foreign policy, as the President, and that of Dulles, an erstwhile consultant to the Department of State, as the Secretary of State, meant a continuity rather than a change. One cannot discern anything but a broad agreement between the policies pursued by the two Administrations, both towards the European problems like the European Defence Community (EDC) as well as the Korean and the Vietnamese crises. The differences were those born naturally out of the differences in the personalities of those who occupied the White House and the Department of State and differences in policy implementation rather than in policy formulation.

Such a continuity was discernible in the new Administration's outlook towards Vietnam. It was content to continue with the preceding Administration's line of thinking and its military and economic aid programmes. This was possibly one reason why there was no significant reference to the Vietnamese war during the Presidential campaign of 1952 even though it had assumed importance as a second front against communism in Asia.

The Truman Administration, as it was preparing to leave office, had come to view the problem of Vietnam as an "urgent matter", one where the most important feature was the weakening of the French military effort. This could be traced to two broad factors : (1) The strong body of opinion in France which demanded a withdrawal

from the war leading to a lessening of an aggressive attitude on its part, and (2) the neutral attitude of a good many Vietnamese who would not join one side or the other until they were reasonably assured of its victory and the security of their own interests.[1] To help the French in their plight, the Truman Administration had extended military aid and, towards the end of its term, had started military conversations with the United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand in order to "devise agreed military solutions against the contingency of overt Chinese intervention in Indo-China".[2]

The Eisenhower Administration broadly agreed with this course. It felt that the French should be helped to defend themselves both "politically and militarily within the proper limits".[3] While viewing Indo-China as a very important issue which deserved immediate attention, the new Administration was faced with a dilemma that it inherited from its predecessor. The colonial nature of the war and the French reluctance to assure publicly the right of the Vietnamese to determine their own political future, had weakened the American efforts to interpret the war as one of "freedom versus communism". It had made the American task of extending moral and greater material support to the French considerably difficult, by subjecting it to a domestic controversy. Despite this the Republican Administration, like the preceding Democratic one, resolved the dilemma by recognizing that the need to stop the communist advances was more importanl than the granting of complete independence to the Vietnamese and it set out to devise plans for "strengthening the defenders".[4]

The United States under President Eisenhower, viewed the problem of Indo-China as one of the problems of the Far East, closely linked with the other problems of the area. Whereas the Truman Administration had drawn a parallel between France in Indo-China and the United States in Korea, the new Administration found a "definite relationship" between the two wars. It viewed them as part of the fight against communism in Asia and related to other problems in the region like the British war against the communist guerillas in Malaya and to even the Western stand against the spread of communism in Europe. In the course of his Inaugural Address, the new President described the soldiers of the various Western Powers in these fronts in Europe and the Far East as "defenders of freedom" on whom their fighting conferred "a common dignity".[5] The Address made no distinction between the purposes for which these Allies fought in these wars.

This clubbing together of the various issue in South-East Asia was a part of the new Administration's policy of co-ordinating the efforts of the various Western Powers in this region. The Republican Administration was keen to avoid "going it alone" in Indo-China as the United States, by and large, was compelled to do in Korea—a point for which the previous Administration had come in for severe criticism. In fact even before the new Administration was inaugurated, this was emphasized in the conversations between the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill who visited Washington in the first week of January and the President-elect Eisenhower. According to one report, as a result of this meeting, the British aid in the form of ammunition to the French in Indo-China which started after the NATO resolution of December 1952, were proposed to be increased and were to be accompanied by further help from the United States.[6] The United States also agreed to become a member of a five-nation military liaison group along with Great Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand to exchange military information and defence plans for South-East Asia and to make policy recommendations for the same. Under this new defence grouping of the five powers, Australia offered to place its entire surplus military equipment at the disposal of the French Union forces fighting the Viet Minh.

The new Administration also inaugurated a programme by which staff officers from Korea visited Vietnam, and French and Vietnamese staff groups visited Korea. This exchange aimed at developing a greater co-ordinated programme between the two forces and better training facilities for the Franco-Vietnamese forces.[7] With this purpose in view Marshal Juin of France visited General Mark W. Clark of the United States in Tokyo on 21 February. At this meeting were discussed the measures to be taken in case of a Chinese intervention.[8]

Closely allied to this co-ordination of the various fronts in Asia was also the American eagerness to get the Western Powers to withdraw their fighting forces from the Far East and South-East Asia. The United States believed that the wars in Asia were only part of a wider communist strategy and that the Russian intention was to disperse the Western armed forces in various theatres of war in Asia. Apart from weakening the Western European security, it would also immobilize the Western forces, while Russia itself was utilizing only its satellites to do the fighting. Hence the United States believed that indigenous forces should take over the fighting. Asians should be

trained and equipped to look after themselves. This new approach of the Administration, to be equally applicable to Korea and Vietnam, was a continuation of the Republican platform of "Asians fighting the Asians". The United States believed that France should try to extricate itself from the Vietnamese conflict and help the Vietnamese to gradually replace the French troops; the released French troops should be kept as a "mobile reserve". Towards this purpose the new Administration chalked out a programme of giving more and faster aid to the French in Vietnam in order to help the latter in raising about two new Vietnamese divisions trained in guerilla warfare.

It was with the same aim of withdrawing the American forces from another Asian front viz., Korea, that President Eisenhower announced on 2 February in his State of the Union Message, his order to withdraw the Seventh Fleet from the Chinese waters. The withdrawal was aimed at introducing a new element and thereby breaking the deadlock in the Korean truce talks. The announcement which gave rise to much controversy over the aims and moves of the Republican Administration, was interpreted as putting pressure on the Chinese communists to come to terms in Korea and to convince the latter that the alternate to stalemate would be powerful American attacks on two or three other fronts.[9] This move was also interpreted as seeking to help the French in the Indo-Chinese War. Secretary Dulles subsequently revealed that it was part of a campaign to end the Vietnamese war by preventing an intervention by the Chinese. He explained the new scheme of co-ordinated strategy for the Far East, in these terms:

> Korea and Indo-China are two flanks. There is a large force [Communist China] in the center. If that force in the center can be without danger shifted to one flank or then the other flank it is very difficult to see how any satisfactory peace can be established either in Korea or in Indo-China. It is necessary, I believe, to create some sort of a threat in the center to hold and pin them down and then there is a better chance of getting some success of the two flanks.[10]

The US action then aimed to forestall a Chinese shift to the South once a truce had been signed in Korea.

The President's Order was also interpreted as allowing the Nationalist Chinese raiders to attack the big railways running from Manchuria in the North to Canton and Indo-China border in the South, the railway line through which the Russians and the Chinese

communists had been moving their strategic materials to Korea and Indo-China. This would have been an important military target for the French forces.[11] This point of view was held among others, by Senator Alexander Wiley (Republican, Wisconsin), Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.[12] On the other hand, Senator Mike Mansfield (Democrat, Montana) while welcoming the order, did not think its effect would be good on the war in Vietnam. The Senator who in the coming years was to take an increasing interest in the war, believed "a counter-move will be made to offset the psychology of the Order affecting the Seventh Fleet and that its locale will be in French Indo-China". In his view, the Russians were greatly interested in Vietnam, and hence might step up assistance to the Viet Minh.[13]

The United States also contemplated a major contribution in money and munitions to the war in Vietnam, as one of the steps to help the French. According to one report, the United States was prepared to furnish $42 million to help build the Vietnamese troops but wanted to have its own military observers with such troops. The French High Command was, however, opposed to the idea of having such observers.[14] They were ready to accept aid only if the United States did not insist upon the presence of American instructors with the Vietnamese Army.

American aid to the French in Indo-China found considerable support in the United States. The *New York Times* pleaded for increased American aid and praised the French strategy and efforts in Indo-China. It particularly appealed for an increased supply of motor vehicles.[15] Hanson W. Baldwin, its military columnist, even suggested a South-East Asia Command for better exchange of intelligence and operational data among the interested nations.[16] American aid to Vietnam was also supported by Senator Mansfield who believed the United States should considerably step up military shipment to that area.

The American eagerness for an early French withdrawal was also born out of European considerations. The Eisenhower Administration inherited from its predecessor, a commitment both to see through the European Defence Community and to continue with the aid programme to the French in Indo-China. Eisenhower himself firmly believed EDC to be absolutely essential for the defence of Western Europe. Such a defence would be weakened if the French moved a part of its contingent of NATO to reinforce its troops in Vietnam.[17] Hence the two questions of the French contribution to the war in

Vietnam and its ratification of the EDC treaty continued to be closely linked together. One of the first acts of the new Administration was a visit by Secretary Dulles and Harold Stassen, Director for Mutual Security Programmes to seven European capitals to observe and listen to the European views on EDC. The visit, which coincided with the French National Assembly session of 29 January on the ratification of the EDC, had the main purpose of stressing the need for unity and bringing the French and the German opinion together. The Dulles-Stassen visit and Dulles' warning that if France rejected or delayed the Treaty, the United States might have "to give a little rethinking"[18] to its own foreign policy, helped in saving the EDC at least temporarily. The eagerness of the Rene Mayer Government to secure American goodwill and to prevent a serious crisis in Franco-American relations was mainly responsible for the survival of the Treaty. The United States kept up the pressure on France by sending another mission under David Bruce, a former ambassador to France, on the heels of the Dulles-Stassen visit. The EDC continued to be the basis of a prolonged ideological and political debate throughout the next eighteen months. Into it were dragged many other issues like Franco-American relations and the war in Vietnam.

American impatience with the French delay in ratifying the EDC and the intense pressure which it brought to bear on the French Government and political circles, brought a new strain in the Franco-American relations. This was contrary to the hopes which the French Government had been entertaining, during and after the presidential campaign. The right wing in France had welcomed Eisenhower's victory as marking an end to what it regarded as Truman's anti-colonialist policy. Eisenhower was a man who knew France and whom France was familiar with. The election slogan of liberation of areas under the communist rule was welcomed in France as this might help in the French policy of holding on to its possessions and might even enable it to win over the Viet Minh. However, the new toughness of the Republican Administration over the EDC and its approach to solving the Asian situation had disappointed the French. The defence strategy of the Eisenhower Administration, of making the "Asians fight the Asians" by raising native armies and giving them more control was also unpalatable to France. There was also evidence of American dissatisfaction with the delay in granting independence to the Associated States. All this came at a time when the French were in need of additional aid from the United States for both their own fiscal affairs and for the war in Vietnam.

The French were also concerned with President Eisenhower's announcement in deneutralizing Formosa. It gave rise to fear and uneasiness both among the Vietnamese and the French about the American intentions and possible future moves in the Far East. The French even doubted whether the United States was "qualified to give the free world the kind of leadership which it needs at this critical moment".[19] It was feared, in case of a civil war in China between the Nationalists and the Communists, the Chinese Communists would hit back in Vietnam, where it was particularly easy for them to intervene. Though the presence of Dulles in Europe at this time helped to dispel any fears of a unilateral action by the United States, the French were left with a lurking anxiety about the American Far Eastern policy.

The spring of 1953 also witnessed a marked improvement in the outlook for a Korean armistice. For that very reason, it gave rise to doubts whether an American disengagement from Korea might not mean a greater help from the Chinese communists to the Viet Minh leading to an intensification of the war. The French were keen to get more aid from the United States, and anxiously sought to find out what the American attitude to Vietnam would be once a truce was arrived at in Korea.

With a view to sorting out the various details and to dispel the American dissatisfaction with the French delay in both ratifying the EDC and in granting independence to Vietnam the French Premier Mayer, accompanied by the Foreign Minister Bidault, Finance Minister Bourges-Maunoury and the Minister for the Associated States Letourneau visited Washington towards the end of March. The EDC and the Vietnamese war were the two important issues discussed during the French delegation's meetings with the Department of State. As for the former, the French failed to convince the United States that there must be a settlement of the long standing Franco-German quarrel over the Saar territory before France could ratify the EDC. Dulles found such an argument to have no valid legal basis.[20] On its part France evaded any firm commitment for an agreement on the EDC. Referring to the French attitude to this question, President Eisenhower wrote : "On E.D.C., Bidault continued to talk on both sides of the question."[21]

The talks on the Vietnamese situation, however, went on smoothly. The French Government pledged "to do its utmost to increase the effectiveness of the French and Associated States forces

in Indo-China, with a view to destroying the organized communist forces and to bringing peace and prosperity to her free associates within the French Union, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam".[22] It also agreed to prevent shipment of war materials to communist China. The French in their turn, succeeded in getting the United States to endorse publicly, what perhaps had been privately recognized, viz. that the struggles in Korea and Indo-China were "parts of the same pattern" and that they were interdependent.[23] Though no specific figures were mentioned as having been arrived at, the communique clearly indicated that such aid would be forthcoming as soon as the French military plans had been given "an intensive study". In fact, the French had brought with them a plan hastily drawn up by their Commander-in-Chief Raoul Salan. The plan which would need aid to the tune of $900 million and was approved by the United States, was believed to envisage a scheme to bring the war to a close in two years' time.[24] The French had agreed that if the United States would finance 65 per cent of the cost of the war for a year, all American military aid to continental France would be terminated after a year.[25]

The discussions also sought to dispel the French fears of the consequences of a Korean truce on the Vietnamese War. The communique issued a warning to communist China "not to take advantage of such an armistice to pursue aggressive war elsewhere in the Far East". In case of any such intervention in Vietnam, the United States promised to the French, it would withdraw from the peace efforts in Korea and might consider it as even conflicting with the understanding on which any Korean armistice would be based.[26] Such a pledge to even resume the Korean War carried the United States much farther in its commitment to Vietnam than the previous administration was ever prepared to go.

The French also succeeded in another context, viz. in evading any definite commitment to move faster to grant complete independence to the Associated States and in overcoming any American pressure in this regard. As Eisenhower wrote subsequently : "On Indo-China he [Bidault] evaded, refusing to commit himself to an out-and-out renunciation of any French colonial purpose."[27] No wonder the Washington talks were hailed as a great success in Paris ! The French Government were satisfied that at last Washington understood the French stand and agreed with the latter that it was advantageous to let the war continue. The French even came to believe that the war might be won "with American help".[28]

This French reluctance to grant complete independence to Indo-Chinese States was a problem which worried the United States. It handicapped the Republican Administration in implementing its new defence plans for South-East Asia. It obstructed the United States from committing itself to further material support to the French in Indo-China. The Administration was faced, in the spring of 1953, with the task of convincing the American public opinion and even Vietnamese nationalism that the war which the French were waging, was not a colonial one but a fight against the aggressive moves by the Communists to subjugate the whole area. President Eisenhower has pointed out that such a task had become a "real necessity", if the war was to be won.[29] A mid-year report prepared by the Department of State laid importance on this aspect of the problem. It stated that political discontent with the French impeded the "development of fighting spirit among the indigenous forces and slowed down rate of formation of the Vietnamese army". It was also responsible for the "failure of important elements of the local population to give a full measure of support to the war effort".[30] This dissatisfaction with the French, perhaps, was partly responsible for the United States' not conceding immediately to the latter's request for material and financial support. The United States not only postponed any decision on this but had made such a support conditional on the French devising plans for military action and placing them before the United States for an "intensive study". Secretary Dulles confirmed this in a speech delivered on 18 April. He said, the US Government has told the French that it "would be favourably disposed to giving increased military and financial assistance to plans *realistically designed* to suppress the Communist inspired civil war...."[31] The United States also was not satisfied with the military situation there. It believed the situation might improve if the French supplied more arms to its Vietnamese allies and convincingly assured them of political independence.[32] The United States, pending the implementation of such steps had postponed any decision on the quantity of aid until the NATO Council meeting of 23 April. It, however, had indicated that it might grant a larger aid than before.

Aid, More Aid

The American disappointment over the military situation and its hesitation to grant aid immediately were, however, overshadowed by another event which took place just at this time in the Indo-Chinese war fronts. The winter of 1952-53 had witnessed intense Viet

Minh activities in the neighbouring territories of Laos. These activities indicated the possibilities of an offensive very soon. On 14 April the Viet Minh made their first attack on the Laotian paratroops of the French forces. By the thirtieth of the same month the Viet Minh columns had reached within thirty miles of Luang Prabang, the royal capital, thus leading to general mobilization. The rebel troops which were backed by the Viet Minh, however, withdrew without capturing the capital, only to return later in the year.

The Viet Minh attack on Laos caused considerable alarm in France and abroad. More than its implications to the course of the war or its military significance, were the importance of the political objectives behind these events. This campaign demonstrated that the Viet Minh was psychologically and politically in a position to extend the war beyond its own geographical boundaries. It posed a threat of the war spreading to other neighbouring territories of Thailand, Cambodia and even Burma.

The immediate reaction of Washington to the Viet Minh attack on Laos was for the President to call upon the successors of Marshal Stalin (who died on 5 March) to conclude an honourable peace in Korea and to stop "the direct and indirect attacks on Indo-China". He warned them that any such aggression in South-East Asia would be "met only through 'united action."[33] However, as events showed, such a warning had no effect on the advances being made by rebels. Hence the United States had to adopt more effective action. It saw in Laos a parallel to the Korean situation of June 1950. On 24 April the Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Fleet, General Mark W. Clark, arrived in Saigon to study the war situation and met General Salan. Though the visit was claimed to be of a routine character, its political significance at this time could not be underestimated. General Clark considered the Laotian situation serious. He felt the French needed more transport planes and recommended the same to Washington.[34]

The attack on Laos also lent a sense of urgency to the issue of American help to Indo-China. On 28 April, after a session of Secretary Dulles with the Foreign Relations Committee it was decided to direct important military supplies originally intended for Europe. Following this on 2 May Dulles issued a statement in which, apart from extending the American Government's sympathy to the Laotian Government, he also announced that the United States had "already taken steps to expedite the delivery of critically needed military items

to the forces defending Laos."[35] These military supplies included twenty-four to thirty-six troop-carrier planes of the C-119 type.[36] The United States also sent, in response to an appeal from Thailand, "certain amounts of small arms ammunition", to be followed by other military items.[37] The President sent a message to the Congress on 8 May transmitting the Mutual Security Program for 1954 in which he pointed out the need to make available "substantial additional resources" to France and the Associated States in their military efforts.[38] This programme provided for aid of $ 400 million and some military end items for the French. Secretary Dulles, appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 5 May, also stated that there may be some modest increase in aid of new and more vigorous plans.[39] It was planned to spend $400 million on the procurement of equipment materials and services which were required by, or were necessary for the support of the forces of France and the Associated States.[40] These successive reports to the Congress from the executive branch were capped by a letter from President Eisenhower on 8 May to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, informing the latter of a grant of $60 million as "special aid" to France to support the French and native forces fighting the Communist guerilla forces in Indo-China.[41] The grant was made out of the military end items programme for Europe.

The Laotian events also brought into focus another aspect of the Indo-Chinese issue. While the military aid to the war was generally welcomed, it was also realized that arms alone would not decide the question. The *Christian Science Monitor* pleaded that the American aid be used to promote Indo-Chinese independence rather than to defend the French.[42] Adlai Stevenson, the presidential candidate, on a tour to the Far East believed that France should remove all vestiges of colonialism and grant complete independence.

The Special Study Mission of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, which toured Indo-China at this time, agreed with this view. While affirming that "the Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indo-China",[43] it believed that "clearer and firmer commitment by the French on this question of independence would be effective in exposing fraudulent Communist promises, in uniting the forces of the Indo-China area in their struggle against Communism and in the ultimate attainment of their independence."[44] It also recommended that "consideration should be given to the desire of Vietnamese leaders for

extension of some U.S. aid directly to the Vietnamese rather than chanelling all aid through the French."[45]

The Laotian crisis also created a ripple in the Congress as to what steps the United States should take towards meeting the situation. Representative Dewy Short (Republican, Missouri), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee believed that the United States might have to take whatever steps were necessary to foil the communists in South-East Asia. He went to the extent of suggesting an ultimatum to the Soviet Union to stay out of South-East Asia even if it would mean the United States going to war. Senator William Knowland (Republican, California) too supported prompt action by the United States. He pleaded with the Administration "not to foreclose the use of air or naval power" in order to defend the American national interests in South-East Asia.[46] Senator Paul W. Douglas (Democrat, Illinois) criticized the Eisenhower Administration for acting less promptly and effectively in the current situation than President Truman had done in the Korean crisis. On the other hand Senator Everett Saltonstall (Republican, Massachusetts), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was among those who opposed any such unduly strong action. Saltonstall opposed the United States getting involved in Laos or sending any troops to help the defenders of Laos. He urged that the United States should not diminish its aid to Europe.[47]

The Laotian crisis also revived the proposals for bringing the United Nations into the picture. Following the Communist attack on 14 April, the Government of Laos appealed to the United Nations and many other countries of the world for help—a step which embarrassed and was opposed by the French Government. It believed such a reference would invite a foreign discussion of, intervention in and attack of the French policy by the Asian and African countries; it would, by leading to UN intervention, invite a Chinese intervention on the other side creating a situation similar to that of Korea. Above all the French were still reluctant to internationalise the war in Indo-China oblivious of the fact that it had long ceased to be purely a French affair.

This Laotian appeal for UN intervention and the French refusal to support this appeal brought about a widespread reaction in the United States. There was a general support for the Laotian proposal in the non-official circles. The *New York Times* discounted the French uneasiness on this issue and affirmed that the Laotian case stood on firm grounds. It believed that such a debate in the

United Nations by focussing attention on the Soviet attitude, would help in evaluating the "Communist talk of peace".[48] The *Christian Science Monitor* supported the move on the ground that this would strengthen the hands of non-Communist nationalists in Vietnam. Above all, it believed, this would provide a basis for a settlement of the Vietnamese issue along with other Far Eastern issues.[49]

The American Association for the United Nations too suggested that the American Delegation to the United Nations should bring the problem of the war in Vietnam before the Security Council. It recommended the stationing of a UN Peace Observation Commission in Indo-China.[50]

Such a move was supported by many Congressmen too. The Special Study Mission of the House of Representatives recommended that both the recent attack on Laos as well as the war in Vietnam be placed by the US Government officially before the United Nations for prompt action.[51]

Senators H. Alexander Smith (Republican, New Jersey), Homer Ferguson (Republican, Michigan) and John J. Sparkman (Democrat, Alabama) supported the view that the Laotian crisis merited the UN attention.

On the other hand, Senator Walter F. George (Democrat, Georgia), a member of the Foreign Relations Committee believed that a reference of the issue to the United Nations would tie up the United States with the United Nations as in the Korean case and would not yield quick results. He said that "if we are going to do anything in Indo-China I hope we do it on our own, without United Nations interference".[52] Senator Robert Taft (Republican, Ohio), in one of his last major utterances, expressed a similar view on 26 May. The American experience in the Korean issue had convinced him that the United States should "as well abandon any idea of working with the United Nations in the East and reserve to ourselves a completely free hand...."[53]

The US Government too believed such a step would help in its recommending increased aid to the French and in overcoming some Congressmen's objection of extending aid to the French imperialist interests. Secretary Dulles who was in Paris in connection with the NATO conference also persuaded the French that such a move would make it easier to merge the two issues of Indo-China and Korea and help in including the former in negotiations over Korea.

The American suggestion led to a debate in France and even divided the French Cabinet. The continuing successes of the

Communist forces in Laos along with the American arguments for referring the issue to the United Nations (which, according to *Le Monde*, was Dulles' condition for increased American aid) made the French reconsider their stand. To it was added the bad impression which the French opposition to the Laotian request had created in other parts of the French Union. The French also calculated that the worsening of the situation would inevitably lead to an internationalisation of the conflict. This would lead naturally to a greater participation of the United States in the war and with it to an entry of the United States into what M. Letourneau called "a zone of political pressures and demands".[54] The French came to the view that if the war had to be eventually internationalised one way or other, it would be better to do it under the auspices of the United Nations. *Le Monde* reflected this trend of thinking when it wrote that "Washington would enter the area of the political exactions feared by M. Letourneau" and that the French "shall then have to concede to the United States the right of examination that we have refused to the United Nations".[55] Hence the French Foreign Minister tried to work out a formula for appraising the United Nations officially of the Laotian attack. However, the split in the Cabinet more especially between Bidault and Letourneau was too wide to be bridged.[56] The proposal, in the meantime, lost its urgency when the fighting in Laos abated in the first week of May. The controversy was finally brought to a close by the French Cabinet overruling any such move. Though the United States continued to support the moves by Thailand in this direction, its initial enthusiasm wore off in the face of the French resistance.

To Negotiate or not to Negotiate

The French Government, instead, put forward an alternate move to mitigate the impact of the Laotian crisis as also to solve the Indo-Chines equestion in general. The French seized on the American statements that the issues of Korea and Indo-China were "interdependent" and in fact "were parts of the same pattern". They believed that the issue of Indo-China should be included in the armistice talks on Korea. Coming so soon after the Chinese offer on the prisoners of war question in Korea, the Laotian events indicated what was in store for the Vietnamese war once the Korean truce was signed. The French also believed, as the United States did in general, that the Viet Minh were acting under the aid and counsel of Communist China and Soviet Union. Though the attack on Loas at a time when the Russians had opened a peace offensive

in Korea created some doubts in this regard, it was generally agreed that this was more a demonstration of a Soviet bad faith rather than of any independent line of action by the Viet Minh.[57] Hence the French argued, the two issues of Korea and Indo-China were interconnected and that only a complete settlement of all Far Eastern issues would bring permanent peace to this part of the world.

This French desire to link up the two issues of Korea and Indo-China was part of a nation-wide movement in France to bring the war to a close by direct negotiations with the Viet Minh. The Laotian invasion had confirmed the French pessimism of the outcome of the war in Vietnam and gave rise to accusations and attacks against the government. To this tense atmosphere was added the political crisis with the fall of Rene Mayer's government. Though the fall of Mayer's government could be attributed to many reasons of a purely domestic character, his support to EDC, his eagerness to court American goodwill, his opposition to negotiations in Vietnam and his readiness to accept the American suggestion to refer the war to the United Nations were some of the contributory causes. In this atmosphere of tension and frustration, the proposals to negotiate the war in Vietnam received a new fillip. Many influential political personalities like Mendes-France, Albert Sarraut, a veteran Radical Socialist statesman and President of the Assembly of the French Union, and Paul Reynaud, a former Prime Minister, were among those who favoured an end to the war, either by negotiations or through an international conference. The Committee of Former Premiers convened by President Vincent Auriol had recommended the consideration of the Vietnamese issue along with Korea. It urged the new Government to take up this proposal as the first among the foreign policies to be followed and place it before the Bermuda Conference which was scheduled to be held very soon.

The French eagerness to negotiate the Vietnamese question either as a separate issue or as part of the Korea truce talks was not very welcome in the United States. Though the United States had declared on various occasions that the two issues were interdependent and similar to each other, this did not lead to any American support for the French proposals. Walter Lippmann traced the reasons for the American reluctance to the fact that France had all along kept the Vietnamese war as its own special preserve; the other Powers did not have any influence or authority as in the Korean case. The Vietnamese case was also more complicated since it involved the

settlement of Vietnam's political future.[58] The United States also felt such a general Far Eastern settlement would be possible only if the French internationalised the war by referring it to the United Nations.

The United States also disapproved of any direct negotiations between the French and the Viet Minh. At a time when the cry was intense in France to bring the war to an end, the United States was more eager to continue with the war. Reflecting the general opinion in the United States, the *New York Times* wrote that such negotiations would not achieve any useful purpose and would be very frustrating.[59] Any talk of negotiations with the Viet Minh either by France or any of the Associated States was according to the *Times* irresponsible, mischievous and dangerous. It felt strongly that the French could not at this stage retire from their obligations even if complete independence were to be granted. The fighting should continue to be in the French hands with a good amount of material aid coming from the United States. James Reston of the same paper argued that any talk of negotiations was untenable, as even such talks might lead to a staggering amount of defection to the enemy. In his view, nor was the Korean parallel suitable to Vietnam, as there was no strict line dividing the enemy ranks in the latter case.[60]

It was generally felt that the way for the French to minimise their financial burden and to extricate themselves from the Vietnamese entanglement would be to strengthen greatly the nationalist government in Vietnam, to give complete independence to the Associated States and to help them build their own native armies so as to replace the French forces at the earliest. In the American view, the war should not be brought to an end by negotiations but should be gradually transferred to the Vietnamese forces. It was generally assumed that the United States would step in and fill the vacancy created by France, by substantial financial and military aid to the Vietnamese directly.

Hence intense pressure was sought to be brought on the French to grant complete freedom to the Vietnamese both in the political and military spheres. The *New York Times* in frequent editorials repeatedly pleaded for the cause of Vietnamese independence as the only means to defeat communism. It gave wide coverage to the views of Vietnamese nationalists, more especially to the strained relations between the French and the Cambodian King.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee too in a report on the Mutual Security Authorization Bill, presented on 16 June asked for more convincing assurance from France than had yet been received by the Associated States, for their independence. That alone, said the Report, would win the local population's support for the fighting against the Communist led guerilla forces.[61]

These American pressures for granting greater independence came against the background of an increasing demand from the Indo-Chinese States for a revision of their status. Negotiations in this regard between France and Cambodia had already started in March, but these demands increased further when the Laotian crisis confirmed the weakness of the French. The relations between France and the Indo-Chinese States became further strained with the French devalution of the piastre with barely two hours' notice of the change to the Vietnamese government. This French action was interpreted as demonstrating the limits of their autonomy and as violating the Pau Agreements. These and other grievances strengthened the hands of King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia who spearheaded the attack against France. The Cambodian Government asked for a status of independence similar to that of India and Pakistan within the Commonwealth and was not willing for any concessions short of it. To it were added the mounting tension in Vietnam and the recommendations of the new French Commander-in-Chief in Indo-China, General Henri Navarre. This made the French offer on 3 July to open simultaneous but separate negotiations with the three Associated States for a review of their status within the French Union. These talks were accompanied by some reforms like the abolition of the much criticised Ministry for the Associated States and its replacement by the post of a Secretary of State responsible to the Prime Minister. The posts of Commander-in-Chief and High Commissioner in Indo-China were separated and to the latter was appointed Maurice Dejean, a professional diplomat. However, these talks did not go on very smoothly or steadily, except in the case of Laos.

The slow pace of the negotiations, marked by greater demand and threats on the part of Cambodia, made the United States once against impatient. The United States which considered the outcome of the negotiations to be important to the outcome of the war in Vietnam, suggested to the French Government a change in the tsructure of French Union into something like the British Common-

wealth.[62] This proposal gained increasing currency even among the French especially among those who had earlier supported Mendes-France's views and brought about a division within the French cabinet. However, any serious consideration of this proposal was postponed for discussion in the impending Washington Conference of the Three Big Foreign Ministers.

The French offer to open negotiations and the changes brought about in the cabinet portfolios, could also be attributed to the prospective conference in Washington and the need for more American aid for the newly formulated Navarre Plan.[63] The Navarre Plan was proposed to be placed before the American Government during the course of this conference. The French offer to open negotiations also came at a time when the American Congress was discussing the Mutual Security Program for 1964 which sought to provide France nearly $400,000,000.

The passage of this programme at this very time through both the Houses of the Congress was marked by a singular feature. The French policy towards European security, its attitude towards the question of Indo-Chinese independence and its relations with the United States, dominated the proceedings in both the Houses as well as in their Committee Hearings on the Mutual Security Bill. While in the House of Representatives, the discussions centred around France's attitude to EDC and Russian threat to Western Europe, the discussions in the Senate were almost completely monopolised by the French failure to grant complete independence, its repercussions on the course of the war in Vietnam and on the aid policy of the United States. With a view to make the French commitment to the EDC more firm, the House Foreign Affairs Committee recommended and the House adopted an amendment to the Bill as proposed by Representative James P. Richards (Democrat, South Carolina). The Amendment provided that "not less than 50 per cent of the funds authorized for military assistance to Europe in fiscal year 1954 shall be made available only for the European Defence Community."[64] Besides Representative Richards there were others like H. R. Gross (Republican, Iowa), even John M. Vorys (Republican Ohio), the floor manager for the Bill and Robert B. Chiperfield (Republican, Illinois), Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, who expressed dissatisfaction with the French delay.

This dissatisfaction was also widespread in the Senate where Senator Taft and Lyndon B. Johnson (Democrat, Texas) proposed

an Amendment that the "President may, in his discretion, withhold not to exceed $ 1 billion of the assistance authorized to be made available for the year...until such time as the treaty establishing the European Defense community...comes into effect."[65] However, more than the EDC it was the question of French relations with the Associated States and the French reluctance to grant complete independence that was severely criticized in the Senate. The Senate, with a near unanimity, believed that only the granting of complete independence and a Constitution to the Vietnamese, would win the war for the West. The opinion on this was so strong, that on 1 July Senator Barry M. Goldwater (Republican, Arizona) proposed an amendment which, had it been accepted, would have deprived the French of any aid until the latter gave a "satisfactory assurance to the President of the United States that an immediate declaration will be made to the people of the Associated States setting a target date for the adoption of a constitution for such States and for the establishment of their complete independence.[66] This amendment, however, was viewed as being too strong by some, even while they agreed with the spirit behind it. Hence a substitute amendment was introduced by Senator John F. Kennedy (Democrat, Massachusetts) which expressed the hope that the grant made to the war in Vietnam would be administered in such a way "as to encourage through all available means the freedom and independence desired by the people of the Associated States, including the intensification of the military training of Vietnamese".[67] Event hough both the amendments were finally rejected, it was not before the Senate expressed its deep resentment with the French attitude by a cut in the allocation for the French in Indo-China by 25 per cent.[68]

Thus the 83rd Congress showed itself more concerned with the Indo-Chinese situation than any of the previous Congresses. The findings of a series of Congressional field studies during 1953 stressed this anxiety. The passage of the Mutual Security Bill through both the Houses was also punctuated with reference to the Vietnamese war. There was a near unanimity in the Congress in its attitude to the crisis. While supporting continued American aid to the war, the Congress, just like the executive, believed that it was the French ambiguity to the issue of independence to the Associated States that impeded a successful conclusion of the war. The Congress also strongly resented the French policy of treating the war as its domestic concern and supported internationalising it. At the same time the Congress was wary of not pushing the French too hard for any

meaningful concessions, for fear of a French withdrawal. It is noteworthy that inspite of the strong criticism against the French "colonial war" in Vietnam not a single Congressman desired a French withdrawal before achieving complete victory.

The Big Three Foreign Ministers in response to a call from Churchill,[69] met on 10 July in Washington to consider top-level talks with the Soviet Union. The Conference which concerned itself mainly with the European issues, also took up Far Eastern Affairs.

The French delegation came to the Conference eager to discuss two aspects of the Vietnamese issue. One was the proposal to negotiate the Vietnamese question by linking it up with the Korean armistice talks in the form of a political conference. The other aspect was to find out what support it could expect from the United States if it decided to pursue the war to a victorious end. The French delegation placed before the Conference both its 3 July offer to open talks on the status of the Indo-Chinese States, as also its plans for military operations which came to be known as the Navarre Plan.

As for the first proposal, the French Foreign Minister failed to get a favourable response from the United States. The United States considered it impossible, as the Korean issue was a UN affair while the Vietnamese fighting was the "primary responsibility" of France. France could only get a declaration that "an armistice in Korea must not result in jeopardising the restoration or the safeguarding of peace in any other part of Asia".[70]

Regarding the second question, the United States approved Navarre's Plan in principle. Referring to this new Plan, Dulles said in his Report to the Nation, "The new French plans are vigorous and deserve to be implemented in that spirit."[71] He undertook to persuade the Congress to vote additional aid to the French. The United States, however, felt that such a task would be made easier for the American Administration if only the French could give them some sort of an assurance that the EDC would be ratified without further delay. The French, apparently, made no commitment in this regard though the Communique expressed some pious hopes about the EDC.

The United States also applauded the French efforts to open negotiations with the Associated States and thought the proposal of independence within the French Union would "make it easier to stop Communist aggression in that part of the world".[72] Dulles was even

convinced that the Associated States were eager "not to be wholly divorced from France" and preferred to have "a French Union like the British Commonwealth".[73]

The decisions of the Washington Conference were significant for the course of the war in Vietnam. The French had come to be convinced that the war was becoming increasingly profitless and that with the signing of the Korean truce, Vietnam might become the acutest area of conflict between the East and the West. At the same time the Korean truce also pointed to a hope that it might be followed by an Indo-Chinese settlement. This frustration with the war and the new hope for peace in Vietnam, came to be represented for the first time in the official policy of France and placed before the Department of State.

The Conference could also be considered as the beginning of the American advocacy of "united action". It was for the first time that the various aspects of the Vietnamese question were comprehensively discussed in a Big Three Conference and its conclusions released in a Communique. Dulles also said that if Vietnam needed further assistance, the interested States would act with "a common and growing co-operation".

The Washington Conference also sought to resolve the various conflicting positions of the United States and France. The United States which was equally keen to bring the war to a close, however, opposed both direct negotiations as well as any international settlement. This was why neither the Communique nor Dulles' Report, mentioned anything on the current French thinking to bring the war to a close by direct negotiations with the Viet Minh. Such a quick and victorious end, in its view, should be brought about by either France internationalising the war through the United Nations or continuing to have the primary responsibility for the fighting with increased support from the United States. The United States was clear in its stand against a direct intervention by itself or even to sending its ground troops to support the French.

In its eagerness to get the French continue the war, till they succeeded in defeating the communists, the United States veered round to the former's view that membership within the French Union was the only basis on which negotiations could be conducted. It worked in the months that followed to avoid a break in the negotiations between France and the Associated States. It even aligned itself with France so as to give the French no

pretext for withdrawing in disgust. Even though it was aware of the Vietnamese pessimism on the outcome of the negotiations, it brought pressure on them to agree to the talks. It was also aware that any talks conducted by Bao Dai on behalf of the Vietnamese would not be popular. President Eisenhower was even convinced that "had an election been held at this time, Ho Chi Minh would have been elected Premier".[74] However, the United States chose to ignore these political factors and allowed itself to be overruled by military considerations. The pressure which it brought on the Cambodian King, whom it originally encouraged, to participate in the negotiations could be explained in this context. At the same time, the United States was keen to separate itself from the French stand on the issue of colonialism. It missed no opportunity to hint at the colonial nature of the existing French relations with the Associated States and to stress its hope that negotiations would lead to complete independence. It also tried to justify its aid, by picturing the war in terms of anti-Communism. It believed that the negotiations by leading to some results on the issue of independence, would help to separate the two aspects of colonialism and Communism in the war.

The Navarre Plan which in the coming year had emerged as a controversial military strategy, became the cornerstone of the Franco-American military policy in Indo-China. For the French it was the fulfilment of a condition to get the badly needed increase in the aid from the United States. They found in it a last chance to win some positions and gain some strength which would give them a better bargain in their contemplated negotiations with the Viet Minh. In their view the main task of Navarre was to defend Laos as best as he could and above all to safeguard the French Expeditionary Corps. He was to prepare the way in military terms to the maximum extent possible towards negotiations and that without expecting any more French troops.[75]

As for the United States, the Navarre Plan served as a means to overcome the Congressional criticism in providing increased aid to the French, This was helped by the favourable report given by Lieut. General John W. O'Daniel, Commander of the US Army Pacific who headed a military mission that toured Indo-China at this time. Its purpose was to discuss with Gen. Navarre the manner in which the United States' material and financial aid might be utilized best as to contribute to the

advancement of the French objectives. The O'Daniel Mission was also given the task of "insuring an increasingly close integration of the U.S. assistance with the plan development by the authorities of France and the Associated States", with a view to "increase the efficiency of the military efforts by France".[76] At the end of the survey tour, the Mission recommended an increase of military aid though it believed that the United States should be allowed to be informed of French operation plans, even if it was not going to participate in developing them.[77]

These recommendations influenced considerably the American approval of the Navarre Plan. The National Security Council backed President Eisenhower who was more than willing to support the Plan.[78] The United States hoped "that picking up the check in Indo-China would help to win approval of the European Defence Community in Paris".[79] "The money that the United States would save from such a military merger of the European countries", calculated the Administration, "would repay the investment in South-East Asia many times over".[80]

The American approval of and aid for the Navarre Plan meant giving a major responsibility for the war to the United States. It established a military liaison between the Pentagon and the forces fighting in Vietnam.[81] Neal Stanford wrote in the *Christian Science Monitor* that the United States was on the way to making the war its own concern.[82]

Backing the Navarre fiasco

Following the passing of the Mutual Security Act by the Congress providing a sum of $400,000,000 for the French forces, the United States granted an additional amount for the specific purpose of implementing the Navarre Plan. This grant which amounted to $385 million was made on 30 September and was to be available before the end of 1954. This increase in aid which brought the American share of the cost of the war to almost 70 per cent was, however, hedged in with certain conditions. The French in accepting the various conditions, had pledged :

(1) to carry out its announced intention of perfecting the independence of the three Associated States in Indo-China, through negotiations...

(2) to make every effort to break up and destroy the regular enemy forces in Indo-China,

(3) to carry through...the plans for increasing temporarily French forces to levels considered necessary to assure the success of existing military plans.

The French also agreed that this increase in their effort would not entail making "any basic or permanent alteration of the French Government's plans and programmes for its N.A.T.O. forces".[83] The French were also supposed to have promised the United States in confidence, "to take into consideration the opinions expressed by the American authorities in regard to the elaboration and execution of strategic plans".[84]

This near-doubling of American aid to the war came in the midst of various statements of the American Administration expressing its deep concern over the war along with a greater realization of its importance to the United States. The most important aspect of the war which occupied the United States' attention at this time was the movement of the Chinese forces, which now that they were relieved from Korea, might be directed to Vietnam. Hence the American Government, to prevent any possibility of active Chinese participation in the Vietnamese war, sought to adopt a deterrent approach. It stressed in unmistakable terms its concern for the security of Vietnam and the consequences that might follow if the Chinese communists sought to ignore this important consideration.

In August, President Eisenhower declared that a Chinese intervention in Vietnam would be "something...of a most terrible significance to the United States".[85] Nearly a month later, Secretary Dulles speaking to the American Legion Convention, spelt out in greater detail this American concern. With a view to prevent any such intervention Dulles drew another defensive perimeter (cancelling the previous one of Secretary Acheson) wherein he said, "A single Communist Chinese aggressive front extends from Korea on north to Indo-China in the South. The armistice in Korea, even if it leads to a political settlement in Korea, does not end United States concern in the Western Pacific area."[86] In defence of this perimeter, the Secretary warned the Chinese, the United States might have to take counter-measures and intervene directly. In one of the strongest statements which the United States had as yet made over the Vietnamese crisis, Dulles said, "There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own army into Indo-China. The Chinese communist regime should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be con-

fined to Indo-China".[87] This warning was reiterated by Under Secretary Bedell Smith in a speech on 15 September at the annual Conference of the UNESCO National Commission. He not only repeated the warning but went further and defined aggression as an attempt by the Chinese to move its "volunteer" units into Vietnam to reinforce the Viet Minh. He spelt out that the American reaction would be "adequate to meet such a grave situation".[88]

This statement of Dulles could be properly called the beginning of a debate on direct intervention by the United States, even though it did not grow into an acute controversy till as late as April 1954. These warnings also anticipated the theory of "massive retaliation" which came to be formulated by Dulles in January 1954. It is, however, doubtful whether the Secretary's statement really indicated any possibility of an immediate intervention by the Chinese communists. Nor was it really convincing that the United States had come to a point in its attitude to the Vietnamese crisis where it found direct intervention by it necessary and feasible, even though Dulles was careful to add that he was making the warning "soberly in the interests of peace". One finds it difficult to agree with Melvin Gurtov that the United States was motivated by the concern that a communist success in Indo-China was a threat to the United States as much as the US intervention in Korea was a threat to Communist China; or that, Dulles was as serious in drawing a line and threatening China with an intervention if the latter trespassed it, as China was in drawing a line across River Yalu in the Korean crisis.[89]

As Gurtov himself has cited, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as the intelligence community did not believe that the Chinese would intervene directly or even resort to air attacks. The logistical problems faced by the Chinese in South-East Asia were much greater than those in Korea.[90] This opinion was confirmed by Everett F. Drumright, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in November 1953. He believed that neither Dulles nor "any other high official of State or the Pentagon seriously entertained the idea that there would be direct intervention". "Sometimes statements are made", he continued, "for political rather than realistic reasons."[91] The United States, in conformity with this had also made it clear to the French that it would not use American forces in the Vietnamese war; nor would it use or threaten to use the atom bomb there.[92] Hence these warnings could be only interpreted as born out of an eagerness to localise

the war and to keep the Viet Minh fighting alone. This would enable the French to sort out other political issues with the Vietnamese. The United States, at this juncture, was also considering the Navarre Plan. It realized, even if the Plan were to be approved and implemented immediately, it would not be before 1955 that the war might be brought to an end. Hence, as the French were doing the fighting, the United States assigned to itself the task of dissuading the Chinese from jumping into the fray. It is very doubtful whether the United States would have directly intervened, had the Chinese ignored these warnings and stepped up their support to the Viet Minh. The warnings were at best, a middle-of-the road approach of the Administration in view of the frantic French pressures on the one hand and the American Congress opposition on the other for further involvement in Indo-China.

It is even doubtful whether any such direct intervention would have been welcomed by the French public opinion. Even the American aid to the Navarre Plan was looked at with suspicion by the French public. The French viewed the American aid as taking away from them the prerogative of initiating any negotiations with the Viet Minh and as putting indirect pressure on them to continue fighting the unpopular war. The French opinion resented sending any more troops into Indo-China, more so at the American bidding.

The United States was well aware of the French desire for bringing the war to an end. The London Conference of 16 October where Indo-China was discussed among the Big Three Foreign Ministers had only convinced Dulles that "the course of the war in Indo-China had created a serious danger for the Laniel Government in France".[93] However, the American reaction to this danger of a political crisis was not one of sympathetic understanding. The more intense the French desire for negotiations, the more concerned the United States was for a continuation of the war. It was clearly understood and agreed in the American Administration that the war should go on, with stepped up American support if necessary. The United States was quite decided that it would not agree to any settlement of the war, if such a settlement conflicted with the basic imperatives of American policy in the area.

Hence it sought to counterbalance the French pessimism by expressing hopes of a victory over the communists, by encouraging the French efforts to grant independence to the Associated States and by eulogising the fresh vigour and determination with which the

French were carrying on the fighting. The American authorities even began to see (truly or otherwise) a turn of events for the better and an improvement in the gloomy prospects of the war. Dulles went to the length of forecasting that the war could be won in 1954.[94]

The United States also supported the French in its efforts to improve its relations with the Cambodian and Vietnamese nationalists. American officials persuaded the latter to adopt a moderate course and co-operate with the French. They tried to impress on the Vietnamese that to achieve permanent independence, communism would have to be defeated first and that this could be done only by carrying on within the framework of the French Union.[95] There was even a talk of the United States cutting off its aid to Cambodia unless the latter retreated from its neutralist posture to the Viet Minh. It tried to avoid a break in the negotiations between France and the Associated States, as it feared this might lead the former to pull out of Indo-China. The United States was also afraid that such a break might result in the Laniel Government being overthrown and replaced by a government committed to negotiations with the communists. The pressure which the United States sought to bring on the Associated States clearly showed that it had decided to push the question of complete independence to the Indo-Chinese States to a secondary position.

The United States also stood firm in its opposition to the French pulling out of Indo-China. Nixon, in expressing this approach stated "under no circumstances could negotiations take place that would place people who want independence under bondage. It is impossible to lay down arms until victory is completely won."[96]

Gordon Walker, a distinguished Labour Member of the British Parliament, also pointed out to a third line of approach on the part of the United States towards the French desire for negotiations. This was the military approach of finding a new formula for the American participation in the war beyond the present financial aid programmes. This had become necessary, as in the eyes of the United States, any negotiations with the communists would be as serious a blow as it would have been if the communists had captured Korea.[97]

As the Department of State was working to stall any French effort towards negotiations another event took place which threatened

to upset the former's aim. In an effort to exploit the widespread desire in France for negotiations, Ho Chi Minh, in an interview to the Stockholm newspaper *Expressen* indicated his readiness to examine any French proposal for armistice in Vietnam. The offer which was repeated throughout December over the Viet Minh Radio evoked widespread interest in France. Though it did not lead to a commitment by the French Government to any immediate negotiations, it cornered the French Premier who, not long ago, had put the blame for the continuation of the war on the Viet Minh. The Ho Chi Minh offer further isolated the French Government from its people. It also strengthened French suspicions of the American intentions since practically all the truce offers were inevitably followed by condemnation of the American "imperialist" aims. Coming as it did on its eve the offer sought to influence the discussions and decisions of the Bermuda Conference which met from 7 December.

The Bermuda Conference attended by President Eisenhower, Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Minister Bidault in the place of the ailing French Premier Laniel considered, among other issues, the Vietnamese war. Though the Communique released at the end did not mention anything of significance, it was widely reported that the United States had expressed its impatience with the French desire for peace in Indo-China as well as the growing French opposition to the EDC. It was also speculated that there were some unpublicized agreements arrived at in Bermuda, namely that Bidault had promised the United States that he would not take up Ho's peace offers but would go ahead with the war. It was also agreed that the United States would send to Indo-China American instructors with experience in Korea. The Vietnamese officers would be trained by the US Army and a US military mission would take part in the organization of Vietnamese units. Also, American officers from Tokyo would be attached to the French High Command in Indo-China.[98] It was also agreed to have unanimity on the preconditions to have a Big Five meeting (the other too being Communist China and Soviet Union), one of the preconditions being a genuine desire on the part of the communists to break the Korean deadlock. This agreement raised hopes among the French that a settlement for the Vietnamese war might be linked up with a political conference on Korea.

Meanwhile even as these agreements were being arrived at in Bermuda, the war in Vietnam had once again revived with the end of the rainy season. The French on 20 November had captured Dien Bien Phu from the enemy. This was hailed as a great success.

From the military point of view. Dien Bien Phu became the centre of the French strategy in the subsequent months and it was decided to hold this outpost at all costs. The French turned it into a "fortress" and moved more and more equipment and men into the fortress. This marked the beginning of what came to be known as the battle of Dien Bien Phu where the finale of the Vietnamese crisis was to be played.

This strategy of building up Dien Bien Phu as a ground for conventional battle against the core of the Viet Minh troops, however, created widespread doubt and pointed to an essential gulf between the US military thinking and Navarre's tactics. President Eisenhower viewed this step as unexplicable and wrong. He was concerned with the fate of troops in an isolated fortress to which the only means of resupply was by air. He was confirmed in this by the intelligence report that the Viet Minh were encircling the fortress of Dien Bien Phu. In his view "while the location of Dien Bien Phu was of minor military significance, the far-reaching psychological effects which the loss of this garrison of fine troops might have on the French would be serious."[99]

To this concern of Navarre's strategy of Dien Bien Phu was added the anxiety born out of the second crisis in Laos on 23 December. This resulted in practically cutting Indo-China into two along the 16th Parallel which was militarily as well as politically important. It affected the French plan of establishing a large garrison at Dien Bien Phu. Politically it bore a relationship to the prospective meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Berlin.

However, there was a wide divergence of thinking even among American leaders. While Eisenhower's book shows his own pessimism as well as that of Admiral Radford and Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA, the American military personnel on the spot like Major General Thomas J.H. Trapnell, Chief of MAAG approved the Dien Bien Phu operations.[100] Again while Eisenhower records that the operations were started a year in advance of the build up contemplated in the Navarre Plan, thereby deviating from the original strategy,[101] Dulles himself was not convinced that "anything that has happened upsets appreciably the timetable of General Navarre's Plan". "There is no reason that I am aware of", Dulles added, "for anybody to get panicky about what has happened."[102]

In the midst of this confused military and political picture that Indo-China presented, one thing stood out clearly in the American

policy. The United States found itself with no alternative except to back the Navarre Plan, whatever it had come to mean in practice now. The United States realized the need to help the French as effectively as it could to ensure success to the Navarre strategy. Whatever might have been its doubts on the outcome of the Dien Bien Phu battle, the United States found itself committed to back this effort of General Navarre. In the early months of 1954, Dien Bien Phu became the centre of the Franco-American hopes and the testing ground of their military policy. Hence as the new year opened, the United States was faced with the task of finding ways to help the French. The only feasible and the least risky method was, as Eisenhower recorded later on, to provide material aid and this the United States was already giving to the extent that the French forces could absorb. The US President felt, without the American technical personnel to train the French and Vietnamese in the maintenance and operation of advanced equipment, to send more would be superfluous.[103] The other way in which the United States could have helped the French would be by air strikes with American aircraft. This would have been very timely, as Navarre had requested the French Government on 1 January for air power reinforcement since Dien Bien Phu had become "above all an air battle".[104] However the American Administration avoided any such offer, as it might be viewed as direct American intervention, thereby triggering a possible Chinese intervention. Further, such an air strike might not be very effective in view of the Viet Minh forces being widely dispersed.

New Look ?

Meanwhile on 12 January, in an address before the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, Secretary Dulles evolved a new strategy for the United States. The policy which came to be known as the "New Look" was an attempt to reconcile a tough policy toward world communism with a reduction in military expenditures —one of the promises made during the presidential campaign in 1952.[105] The new policy as outlined by Dulles, believed it was not sound military strategy to permanently station US land forces in Asia or to commit the American forces for the permanent support of other countries. On the other hand, it should try to get maximum protection at a bearable cost. This could be done by placing more reliance on "the deterrent of massive retaliatory power". This deterrent power could be most effectively employed if (1) the Western Allies were to be willing and able to respond vigorously at places and with

means of its own choosing, (2) if they faced the glut of the manpower which the enemy possessed by means and weapons in which the West was superior, presumably nuclear arms.

Though the New Look Policy was formulated in a global context and Dulles made only a passing reference to Indo-China, the new formula assumed increased importance in view of the crisis in Indo-China. In fact to some extent the timing of the address if not the text of it, was prompted by the events in Indo-China.

In the beginning of 1954, not only had the battles in Indo-China acquired an increasingly gloomy prospect, but there was also an appreciable increase in the amount of Chinese aid, both technical and military, to Indo-China. The French keeness to negotiate soon and the American desire to bring the war to a victorious close at the earliest, looked like being thwarted by the prospects of a Chinese intervention.[106] The battle over Thakhek in December-January showed that the American warnings had not been taken too seriously by the communist forces. Hence the United States viewed the need to announce its new policy as a final effort to deter the Chinese from intervening.

Though Dulles denied later that the speech bore any direct relation to the Vietnamese events, it appears that it was prompted by the immediate situation in that theatre. Gurtov has cited a telephonic conversation between the Secretary of State and Allen Dulles to the effect that the battle for Thakhek from 28 December onwards was decisive in fixing up the date and the forum before which the policy would be announced.[107] Further the reference in the speech that "a potential aggressor...glutted with manpower" might try to use this superiority in manpower clearly showed that the "potential aggressor" Dulles pointed out was only Communist China.

It is, however, doubtful how far the 'New Look' strategy could be applied to a war like the one in Vietnam where the political and military considerations were inextricably intermixed. The new policy was also opposed by the American Army which viewed it as one which concentrated unduly on air power. Army leaders were sceptical whether air power would be as effective as was believed, in a place like Indo-China. The Vietnamese war was essentially a conventional warfare and could be fought mainly with ground troops.[108] Mathew B. Ridgway, the Army Chief of Staff, wrote that the Vietnamese war was a bloody jungle war in which the nuclear capability of the United States would have been almost useless.[109]

Lieut. General James Gavin, formerly Chief of Research and Development in the Department of Defense, wrote subsequently about the weakness of the theory of "Massive Retaliation". He asserted that it was found inapplicable to the very first battle fought after the theory had been put forward. When the battle of Dien Bien Phu was finally joined it was one where the initiative lay with the communists, even though it was the French who built it up as a trial of strength. It was a battle where all the modern technology and nuclear power were useless and the battle was fought by man against man. The outcome of the battle caused much soul-searching in the Department of State and Pentagon, as it refuted the entire theory of 'New Look'. It was a battle, Gavin continued, which made the American military authorities realize that no air force, no tactical weapons or SAC could have served the purpose. The Pentagon finally resolved that if the United States decided to intervene it could be done only by the Army and the Marine Corps, though with the full support of other services.[110] Whatever might have been the applicability of the new policy to the Indo-Chinese war, it had aroused considerable apprehension both at home and abroad and brought in turn, considerable clarifications from Dulles. These apprehensions and clarifications necessarily led to a widespread debate in the United States on the immediate objectives of the new policy and the Administration's intentions in this context. The most dominant question in this debate was whether the enunciation of such a policy meant an immediate American intervention in the Indo-Chinese war.

FOOTNOTES

1. Secretary Acheson in his review of South-East Asian situation to the President-elect Eisenhower, as reported by Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope* (New York, 1956), p. 519.
2. Ibid.
3. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years, Mandate for Change* (London, 1963) p. 109.
4. Ibid.
5. *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D. C.), 2 February 1953, p. 168. This source is referred hereafter as *Bulletin*.
6. *New York Times*, 5 January 1953.

7. U.S., House of Representatives, 83 Cong., sess. 1, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report of the Special Study Mission to Pakistan, India, Thailand and Indo-China* (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 55. Referred hereafter as *House Special Study Mission 1953.*
8. "Marshal Juin in Vietnam", ed., *New York Times*, 22 February 1953. Bernard Fall, however, believed that such agreement for co-ordination of military strategy in the Far East had been arrived at between the United States and France even during the previous Administration and these agreements had not been disclosed publicly. Bernard Fall, *The Two Vietnams, A Political and Military Analysis* (London, 1963), p. 122.
9. Robert J. Donovan, *Eisenhower, The Inside Story* (New York, 1956), p. 30.
10. Dulles in a White House Conference for the Advertising Council on 24 March 1953, as cited by Melvin Gurtov, *The First Vietnam Crisis* (New York, 1967), pp. 27-28.
11. *New York Times*, 31 January 1953.
12. U.S. *Congressional Record* (Washington, D. C.), Vol. 99, 6 February 1963, pp. 953-4.
13. *New York Times*, 21 February 1953.
14. Ibid., 25 February 1953.
15. "Our Help in Indo-China", ed., ibid., 23 February 1953.
16. Hanson Baldwin, "In Indo-China Too, The Allies Plan to Set up a strong Asian Army", ibid., 22 February 1953.
17. Eisenhower, n. 3.
18. *Bulletin*, 9 February 1953, p. 214.
19. Secretary Dulles himself referred to this fear in his address to the Nation on 12 February after his return from the European trip. *Bulletin*, 23 February 1953, p. 289.
20. *New York Times*, 28 March 1953.
21. Eisenhower, n. 3, pp. 167-8.
22. In the Communique issued on 28 March in Washington. *Bulletin*, 6 April 1953, p. 491.
23. Ibid.
24. Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indo-China* (London, 1961), p. 268.
25. *New York Times*, 27 March 1953.
26. *Bulletin*, n. 25. President Eisenhower referred to this theme in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on 16 April 1953. Ibid., 27 April 1953, p. 601. Dulles too reiterated this in a speech on 18 April 1953. Ibid., p. 605.
27. Eisenhower, n. 3, p. 168.
28. Alexander Werth, *France 1940-1955* (London, 1956), pp. 601-2.
29. Eisenhower, n. 3, p. 168.
30. Ibid., pp. 168-9.
31. *Bulletin*, 27 April 1953, p. 605. Emphasis added.
32. Dulles in a testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee. *New York Times*, 13 April 1953.
33. *Bulletin*, n. 31.
34. *New York Times*, 26 April 1953.
35. *Bulletin*, 11 May 1953, p. 678.

36. *New York Times*, 3 May 1953.
37. *Bulletin*, 18 May 1953, p. 708.
38. Ibid., 25 May 1953, p. 735.
39. Ibid , p. 738.
40. Harold Stassen before the Commitees on 5 May. Ibid., p. 741.
41. *New York Times*, 9 May 1953.
42. "Indo-China: World Problem", *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 2 May 1953.
43. U.S., *House Special Study Mission 1953*, p. 53.
44. Ibid., p. 51.
45. Ibid., p. 58.
46. *New York Times*, 7 May 1953.
47. Ibid., 4 May 1953.
48. "The Invasion of Laos", ed., ibid., 17 April 1953.
49. *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 May 1953.
50. *New York Times*, 3 May 1953.
51. U.S., *House Special Study Mission 1953*, p. 58.
52. *New York Times*, 8 May 1953.
53. Peter V. Curl, ed., *Documents on American Foreign Relations 1953* (New York, 1954), p. 112.
54. *The Hindu*, 2 May 1953.
55. *Le Monde*, 28 April 1953, as quoted by *New York Times*, 29 April 1953.
56. *Le Monde* reported that while Mayer and Letourneau were in favour of a reference to the United Nations both as a matter of principle and in the hope of discovering a way out of the seemingly hopeless situation, Bidault was firmly opposed to such a step.
57. The British Prime Minister Churchill alone believed that the Laos invasion might have arisen from local circumstances and from plans made long ago, rather than out of Soviet bad faith.
58. Walter Lippmann, "Settlement in Far East", *The Hindu*, 3 May 1953.
59. "Settlement in Indo-China", ed., *New York Times*, 5 June 1953.
60. James Reston, "New Military and Political Strategy Add Key to Triumph in Vietnam", ibid., 16 July 1953.
61. Ibid., 17 June 1953.
62. Ibid., 2 July. The French Union could be roughly compared to a federal arrangement while the British Commonwealth was more of a confederation.
63. Dealt with in detail in the following pages.
64. U.S. *Congressional Record*, vol. 99, 18 June 1953, p. 7061.
65. Ibid., 30 June 1953, p. 7873.
66. Ibid., 1 July 1953, p. 8010.
67. Ibid., p. 8018.
68. *New York Times*, 28 July 1953. The cut was however, restored by a joint sitting of both the Houses on 3 August.
69. The call was for a meeting of Heads of Government of the Big Three at Bermuda. But due to Churchill's illness and the political crisis in France, it became a Big Three Foreign Ministers' meeting.
70. In the final communique released on 14 July at the end of the Conference, *Bulletin*, 27 July 1953, p. 105. Dulles clarified later on that this "other

part of Asia" referred particularly to Indo-China. In a report to the nation on 17 July. Ibid., p. 101. This warning was reinforced by a declaration on 27 July by the sixteen nations which participated in the UN Operations in Korea. It repeated verbatim the warning of the Washington Conference and even added that if the fighting was resumed it might not be confined to Korea. ibid., 24 August 1953, p. 247.

71. Ibid., 27 July 1953,p.101. The plan called for increasing the size of the French Union forces from 200,000 to 250,000 and of native troops from 200,000 to 300,000. By the end of 1954, it was expected that the 550,000 goal would be attained and that victory would be accomplished in a dramatic offensive during 1954 and 1955. The plan also envisaged a relaxation of France's attitude towards independence in order to get the genuine support of the Vietnamese for the war. The National Defense Committee of France, before which the plan was placed on 24 July 1953, approved the proposal to increase the strength of the national armies with the proviso that the cost of the operation would have to be shouldered by the United States. Lancaster, n. 24, p. 266. The other part of the plan dealt with military plans and strategies.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Eisenhower, n. 3, pp. 337-8.
75. This was the specific instruction given by the French National Defense Council on the eve of Navarre's assuming charge as the Commander-in-Chief of Indo-Chinese theatre. Fall, n. 8, p. 124, as well as Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution, Vietnam 1945-1965* (London, 1966), p. 93.
76. *Bulletin*, 29 June 1953, p. 909.
77. *New York Times*, 10 July 1953.
78. Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report* (New York, 1961), p. 120.
79. Ibid., p. 121.
80. Ibid.
81. Eisenhower, n. 3, p. 170.
82. Neal Stanford, "Priority Given to Indo-China", *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 September 1953.
83. In a joint US-French Communique on 30 September 1953. *Bulletin*, 12 October 1953, pp. 486-7.
84. Henri Navarre refers to this condition in his book. Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine* (Paris, 1950), as quoted by Lancaster, n. 27, p. 280.
85. At the annual Governors' Conference, *New York Times*, 5 August 1953.
86. *Bulletin*, 14 September 1953, pp. 341-2.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., 5 October 1953, p. 465.
89. Gurtov, n. 10, p. 33.
90. Ibid., pp. 175-6 (f.n. 47).
91. Ibid., p. 176.
92. Ambassador Donald Heath's statement, as cited by Gurtov, ibid.
93. Donovan, n. 9, p. 30.
94. *New York Times*, 15 December 1953. Dulles had also mentioned such a view in an earlier address to the New York Herald Tribune Forum on 20 October. *Bulletin*, 2 November 1953, p. 588. Besides Dulles, other officials too had expressed similar hopes. For instance, Bedell Smith in an address on the same day at the University of South Carolina, Colum-

bia S.C. ibid., 9 November 1953, pp. 631-2 and Walter Robertson, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs in an address before the Womens' National Republican Club, New York on 2 December. ibid., 14 December 1953, p. 816.

95. Vice President Richard Nixon tried to present this view of the Administration during his tour of Vietnam in November 1953. *New York Times*, 3 November 1953.
96. Ibid., 5 November 1953.
97. Gordon Walker, "Indo-China Test Grows, U.S. Aid Not Enough?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 October 1953.
98. *France-Observateur*, 10 December 1953, as cited by Werth, n. 31, p.651.
99. Eisenhower, n. 3, p. 340.
100. As cited by Gurtov, n. 10, p. 50.
101. Eisenhower, n. 3, p. 339. This change of strategy was opposed by Prime Minister Laniel too. It was considered by many as being solely responsible for the debacle of the French force in May 1954 and prompted a controversy between Laniel and Navarre which went on even after the tragedy. Victor Bator and Shaplen also contribute to this view. Victor Bator. *Vietnam : A Diplomatic Tragedy* (New York, 1965), p. 27.
102. *Bulletin*, n. 109. In this view, Dulles was supported by Admiral Radford.
103. Eisenhower, n. 3, p. 340.
104. Gurtov, n. 10, p. 51.
105. For the text of the speech, see *Bulletin*, 25 January 1954, pp. 107-10. Gurtov gives a good account of the origin and process of the formulation of this policy basing his account on primary sources like the Papers of NSC. See Gurtov, n. 10, pp. 53-56.
106. The following military analysis was given in favour of the view that a Chinese intervention was imminent. The French strategy had assumed, with the implementation of the Navarre Plan the Franco-Vietnamese forces would encounter the Viet Minh by 200,000 men. This shortage in men would make the Viet Minh to not only seek more aid from the Chinese (which could be counter-balanced by increased American aid) but might also compel the Chinese to send in 'volunteers'. It was this hypothesis which started the rumours of Chinese intervention and was perhaps responsible for the warnings issued by the American Secretary of State both on 29 December and 12 January 1954.
107. Gurtov, n. 10, p. 182.
108. The controversy between the Air Force and the Army in the United States on the new policy has been dealt with in more details by Walter Lippmann in his article, "Indo-China's Future", *The Hindu*, 2, March 1954.
109. Mathew B. Ridgway, *Soldier : The Memoirs of Mathew B. Ridgway* (New York, 1956), pp. 274-5.
110. Lt. Gen. James Gavin, *War and Peace in the Space Age* (London, 1959), pp 126-8.

VI

On the Horns of Dilemma

The American debate over the question whether the United States should intervene in the Vietnamese crisis with its troops had started as early as the Korean armistice. This controversy had been aggravated by the 2 September warning of Dulles to Communist China. However, it was not before the beginning of 1954 that the question of direct intervention assumed crucial importance. The renewed Viet Minh activities in Laos and the capture of Thakhek on 28 December by the Viet Minh caused deep concern in the United States. On 29 December Secretary Dulles told a Press Conference that in the event of an invasion of Indo-China by the Chinese, the American reaction "would not necessarily be confined to the particular theatre chosen by the Communists for their operations". This warning, repeated in the course of his address of 12 January, coupled with the new offensive strategy of Massive Retaliation revived the debate, but this time in a more serious form.

These anxieties were increased by another incident. In the first week of February, the Administration announced that in response to French appeals for

urgent aid, the United States had dispatched 200 technicians to assist the French in servicing aircraft. These technicians were to remain there till the middle of June. The United States also sent a number of B-26s. These actions which might not have normally attracted much attention, now were interpreted as the first step towards a direct intervention by the United States. This appeared to be further confirmed by the formation of an *ad hoc* committee consisting of Under Secretary Bedell Smith, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roger Keyes, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Allen Dulles, to study further steps for supporting the Navarre Plan. The President also had ordered that Lieut. General John W. O'Daniel be designated as Chief of the American MAAG in Viet Nam, since the United States "needed military information and judgement from sources in which he (the President) had the utmost confidence".[1] These arrangements were interpreted as indicative of a stepping up of American involvement in Vietnam.

Rumours began appearing that the United States was contemplating sending its ground troops. That increased American intervention was virtually imminent was the tenor of reports in two journals representing business interests as well as a news service of "leftist" orientation. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on 9 February 1954 that Admiral Arthur W. Radford had urged that serious consideration be given to sending a US military training mission to Indo-China. The mission would train and coach native troops and would not engage in actual fighting. The *Journal* report stated that while at first the American soldiers might not be in the front lines, they would be bearing the brunt of the war sooner or later.[2] In the *Magazine of Wall Street* Harold Du Bois wrote that although "vast new heavy contracts as were incident to the Korean adventure are not to be expected, the item of maintenance of other arms alone (in Indo-China) will mean no small volume of business". The Federated Press, the news agency, interpreted the statement to mean that the Administration might resort to an Indo-Chinese intervention, as a miracle drug for Eisenhower's "rolling adjustment" of the economy just as the Korean war helped to maintain the "Truman prosperity".[3] The Federated Press also believed that the Republican Administration was making quiet preparations for military development in Vietnam on the Korean model as a formula for solving the mounting distress at home. This explained in its

view the confidence of President Eisenhower that full time employment and continuing prosperity were right around the corner.[4]

The *New York Times* feared such a dispatch of technicians might be the first step to the commitment of American forces in Vietnam.[5] Bill Costello of CBS believed the Department of State thinking to be one where the choice was between a total military victory and the loss of all South-East Asia.[6]

These rumours led to a minor flurry among the public and caused alarm in the Congress. Several influential Senators opposed the dispatch of American technicians to Vietnam. Senator Mike Mansfield (Democrat, Montana) who was the first to bring up the issue before the Congress, asked whether it meant that the United States would send in naval and air support to be followed at a later stage by combat troops. In his view, the United States should confine itself to supplying essential equipment and material.[7] Senator John C. Stennis (Democrat, Mississippi) too criticized the American action. In his view this was the beginning of American involvement. He said, "...step by step, we are moving into this war in Indo-China and I am afraid we will move to a point from which there will be no return."[8] Representative Clare E. Hoffman (Republican, Michigan) agreed with this view and called the war in Vietnam as one that did not vitally concern the United States.[9]

These Congressmen also criticized the Administration for taking serious steps without prior consultation with the Congress. The assurance of Senator Knowland (Republican, California) that there was no intention to send American combat forces or of the Department of Defense that these technicians would be withdrawn by 12 June and would not go near the combat areas, did not very much remove the Congressional apprehensions.

Apart from these pressures at home against American intervention, such a course was opposed by its Allies too. Sir Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, believed there was no need for any American intervention or even threats of intervention. In his view there was no possibility of any imminent Chinese intervention.[10] The French too opposed any direct intervention by the United States. They feared such an intervention might bring in the Chinese forces which were too near at hand and thereby prolong the war.[11] The French discounted any possibility of Chinese interven-

tion, even though they were steadily building up their forces across the Indo-Chinese frontiers. In fact General Henri Navarre refused the American offer to train the Vietnamese troops or direct the military operations.[12]

Eisenhower in his memoirs, however, records that the prospects of American military intervention in early 1954 were bleak. If the United States had to "properly and effectively render real help in winning the war" (by this long clause, Eisenhower seemed to have meant simply military action), Eisenhower viewed it could be done in three ways : (1) by a legal right through a Franco-Vietnamese invitation which was not forthcoming for obvious reasons; (2) by winning world opinion through a UN action even if the main burden of the operations were to fall on the United States—this was not possible in the face of the French reluctance : (3) by a declaration of war by the Congress in keeping with the various threats of intervention by the United States. This possibility also was remote as the Congress was strongly opposed to vote for another Asian war. Further there was as yet "no incontrovertible evidence" as Eisenhower himself had pointed out, "of overt Red Chinese participation" in the conflict.[13]

Even if the Administration had contemplated any step in this direction as the various reports conveyed, such a course was abandoned in the face of the Congressional and public criticism and above all by France's firm stand against letting American troops in. Hence the Administration soon retraced its steps. President Eisenhower went out of his way to allay such fears of intervention. He stated he was very much opposed to ever getting the United States involved in a hot war in that region, and that he could not conceive of a greater tragedy for America than to become involved in an all-out war in Indo-China.[14] He repeated this in a subsequent press conference too.[15] Secretary Dulles himself soon renounced the application of the "New Look" policy to the Indo-Chinese crisis.[16]

The American decision not to intervene at this time was also based on its hopes that the Navarre Plan could be still successful and that it would be enough if the United States continued to help implement the Navarre Plan. Navarre himself said on 19 February that the Viet Minh offensive efforts had reached their peak and should be decisively defeated in 1955.[17] The Administration was encouraged by the reports it was receiving from General O'

Daniel.[18] Secretary of Defence Charles Wilson too expressed this hope when he said on 9 February that military victory of the Franco-Vietnamese forces was possible and probable.[19] "Victory", he continued, "would be more difficult should the Chinese intervene but there was no reason to assume that America would have to increase its participation in the campaign."[20] Admiral Radford and Bedell Smith too presented a similar point of view in their testimony before a House Foreign Relations Sub-committee. The Navarre Plan, Radford said, was "a broad strategic concept which within a few months should insure a favourable turn in the course of the war."[21]

Hence the United States continued to press the French to act comprehensively and vigorously in prosecuting the war.[22] The United States also made it known to the French that "their commitment in this regard is as binding as is ours (America's) in providing additional money and equipment."[23] It kept reminding France that "the so-called Navarre Plan visualized substantial victory by summer of 1955."[24]

These assurances helped to allay the fears and anxieties of the public to a great extent. The controversy over direct intervention passed, only to be revived very soon, as it became increasingly clear that the Navarre Plan might not lead to the expected results.

Decisions at Berlin

As the United States was debating the question of extending the war by its direct participation, its Foreign Minister, along with those of Britain, France and the Soviet Union was holding a discussion in Berlin and was arriving at a decision to negotiate the issue. The chief result of the Conference (25 January - 18 February) which was held primarily to discuss the German and Austrian questions, was an agreement to hold another and wider conference in Geneva on 26 April on the Far Eastern problems of Korea and Indo-China. It was also agreed to include Communist China as a participant in the Conference.

The US agreement to negotiate the Vietnamese crisis as well as to allow participation to Communist China were decisions which were contrary to the positions that it had been adopting all along. The explanation for this retraction in its Far Eastern policy could be traced to essentially Europ ean considerations.

The proposal to include Indo-China in the agenda of the Conference came from the French Foreign Minister Bidault who, in the face of the mounting domestic pressure for negotiations, had to take back something tangible from the Berlin Conference. Politically, the Laniel Government was in danger of being toppled and replaced by a government which would commit itself to negotiation. Militarily, the Navarre Plan had not come up to the French expectations and there were pressures to negotiate the issue honourably before the French position would become hopeless.

The United States was however initially reluctant and tried to dissuade the French from any proposal for negotiations as, it believed, even such talks would lead to further deterioration in the morale in Vietnam and France. However, under the persistent pressure of the French the United States yielded.

The reasons for this yielding were many. The most important consideration was the American keenness for securing the French ratification for the EDC. The United States continued with its confidence in the Laniel Government to get this ratification and was convinced "that no succeeding government would take a stronger position than his on the defence of Indo-China or in support of the European Defence Community."[25] The United States also felt that if it persisted in not allowing any discussions on Indo-China, it might be held responsible for blocking the Conference. This would aggravate the French opposition to the United States and hence to the EDC. The United States was also eager to preserve the appearance of Western unity and agreed to negotiations, since Britain as well as France were eager for a Far Eastern Conference.

It is, however, doubtful whether these were the real reasons behind the shift in the American stand. The American authorities were only too well aware of the intense opposition to EDC in France and knew that in the prevailing atmosphere no government which supported EDC unconditionally could ever have survived. The US assumption that the Laniel Government had either committed itself to the ratification or would do so in the future was also not based on a correct study of the situation. In fact Bidault, less of a "European" than his predecessor Schuman was, had warned the American delegation that if the latter did not acquiesce on the point, the EDC would be certainly scuttled.[26] Nor could it have been unaware of the unpopularity of the Laniel Government. Just to get the negotiations started would not have made it any more popular, as was

proved by the fall of his ministry right in the middle of the Geneva Conference.

Hence these factors could have accounted for American concessions only partially. The change should be attributed to other reasons. The United States needed to offset the increasing attention Bidault was receiving from the Russian Foreign Minister. In fact the Russians had all along tried to persuade the French on the hopelessness of their present policies in Vietnam and on the unreliability of the United States to intervene in their favour in an extreme emergency. In Berlin itself, as one report maintained, Molotov in his private talks had offered to Bidault to mediate and arrange talks between France and the Viet Minh, in return for the French not ratifying the EDC.[27]

The other important reason for the American agreement for negotiations seemed to be the deteriorating situation in the war and the possibility that France might leave the baby at the American door and that the "moral obligation to carry on the war in Indo-China might be shifted from French shoulders to the Americans."[28] The United States which was reluctant to take up the responsibility for the war, believed it would be better to negotiate before the French will and military position weakened further. The Berlin decisions showed that the US Government, whatever its public posture might be, was committed to non-intervention even if it meant negotiations with the Viet Minh.

The United States sought to minimise the impact of these concessions by certain reservations to the Berlin agreements viz., that "neither the invitation to nor the holding of the above-mentioned Conference shall be deemed to imply diplomatic recognition in any case where it has not already been accorded."[29] In spite of this American contention, this could not be called a real diplomatic face-saver as both the Soviet Union and Communist China hailed the Big Five Conference with Indo-China on its agenda, as a virtual recognition of Communist China as a great power. The nature of the Conference too was not of one between the belligerent sides as the United States had hitherto been insisting upon. It was a round table conference in which the Soviet Union, far from appearing as a member of the "aggressor side" was actually one of the two sponsors. Nor did the Berlin decisions and their defence by Dulles, convince many in the United States. It was criticised by many Senators of both the Parties, Senator Knowland being the most vehement. He called it "appease-

ment" under a "Far Eastern Munich" and warned against the consequences of an agreement with the Communists.[30]

The Berlin decisions had an immediate impact on the military situation too. They provided a deadline before which the two parties would naturally seek to improve their military positions and thereby strengthen their bargaining position at Geneva. The increased military activities of the Viet Minh and their limited but important successes in surrounding Dien Bien Phu perturbed Washington. To these French military setbacks was also added the apparent lack of enthusiasm in France for bringing the war to a military victory. The American Administration was disturbed to find that "the French were aiming not to win the war, but to get into a position from which they could negotiate."[31]

In fact the United States had a foreboding of this even during the Conference. It had warned the French then that they might have to meet this increased threat with "corresponding determination."[32] This pessimism was also shared by General Navarre who believed that it was imprudent and thoughtless to enter into negotiations with Ho Chi Minh at a time when he had already made plans for a major battle at Dien Bien Phu. "The fate of Dien Bien Phu", he wrote, "became sealed on the day when the decision in regard to the Conference at Geneva was made."[33] Hence the United States believed that the French should seek to increase the scale of the fighting and put the maximum efforts in order to force a military decision. It sought to inspire and encourage the French by making formal its commitment to maintain American material aid at the highest level that the French forces could usefully apply.[34] The United States, in turn, had secured a French assurance that the latter would cope up with the situation and hold Dien Bien Phu.[35] In spite of this assurance Washington continued to be apprehensive of the French aims as well as the final outcome of the Dien Bien Phu battle. The battle itself assumed a political importance out of all proportion to its military significance and both Paris and Washington staked all their prestige on this battle. On the part of the Viet Minh, Dien Bien Phu became a potent instrument of psychological pressure on the adversary.

Spectre of Dien Bien Phu

As February came to a close, the military situation only deteriorated from the French point of view. Though the United States

continued to hope against hope that the Navarre Plan would bring victory, France itself seemed to be losing its nerve. French opinion became so concerned that it was feared the fall of the fortress might entail complete withdrawal from Vietnam. The French found the need to dispel any unfounded optimism on the part of the United States. Towards this purpose on 11 March the French Cabinet decided to send General Paul Ely to Washington. General Ely's mission had many purposes. He had to inform the United States of the actual military situation which had become so serious that the whole country might be lost soon, that no military victory could be expected and that the conference strategy in Geneva should be based on this realization. General Ely was also to seek from the United States a formal, publicized obligation to intervene directly, should China decide to send in "volunteers." The French also were keen to know what exact steps would the United States take if the Chinese ignored the threat and actually intervened. Finally the French requested increased American assistance to build up the Vietnamese army.[36]

However even before Ely's mission could materialize, events in Vietnam had taken a turn for the worse, thereby making the mission still more urgent. On 13 March the Viet Minh made their first large scale attack on Dien Bien Phu and reduced it almost to an indefensible state. This assault, followed by heavy losses to both the sides, made the situation serious. The reports reaching the United States estimated that the French had only about a fifty-fifty chance of holding out.[37] The French themselves lost all hopes of saving the situation unless overwhelming forces from outside would come to their rescue. General Navarre sent an urgent appeal to Paris for massive American air support and all possible equipment for transportation by parachute of supplies, as also bombardment of the besieging Viet Minh by American aircraft.

These events modified the aims of Ely's mission to some extent. While drawing a true picture of the hopeless situation in Vietnam which precluded any outright victory, he had to keep alive the American optimism in the war so that the French could secure increased military supplies as well as further auxiliary military personnel. He had to reiterate the French stand that negotiations at Geneva were the only possibility before the French; at the same time he sought a public statement from the United States on the possibility of an intervention.[38]

General Ely on his arrival found the United States most concerned with the outcome of the Dien Bien Phu battle. He found the American Administration only too eager to help the French. In fact immediately after his arrival, Ely could secure from Admiral Radford, orders for the immediate shipment from the bases in the Philippines of "everything" that might be useful in the Vietnamese campaign. At a meeting with President Eisenhower he noticed the extraordinary importance attached by the United States to the battle. Ely recorded that in his very presence the American President gave orders to Radford to save the besieged fortress by satisfying all the requests of the French on a priority basis. On 25 March, General Ely signed an agreement with Admiral Radford providing for US airpower to counter Chinese air intervention.[39] The United States also proposed to the French General far-reaching plans for night-time raids by the American navy and army. Called "Operation Vulture", the venture was regarded as another phase of the American aid programme and an answer to the increased Chinese assistance, without a direct American intervention. Thereby it would not cause a direct intervention by the massive Chinese troops. The offer however, Radford made it clear, was subject to French approval after which it would be further examined by the United States as it would constitute an entry into the war.[40] Ely was able to secure from Washington more than what he had asked for. Besides the American guarantee against a Chinese air attack and the promise to dispatch twenty-five B-26s, he also succeeded in getting the US offer to send 25 officers to train the Vietnamese forces, to be transferred to Paris.

Ely's visit revived the American optimism over the situation in Vietnam. (This was the only point on which perhaps General Ely did not succeed viz., in presenting a true picture of the battle and preparing the United States for a defeat there). These talks with Ely gave a sharp turn to the American policy in Vietnam. President Eisenhower even thought that the French were unduly pessimistic. He thought "odds of two to one favouring an attacker against a position well dug in and determinedly defended should not be regarded with alarm."[41] Following this, the National Security Council reviewed the American policy towards the Vietnamese issue. The remark by President Eisenhower on 24 March that Indo-China and the South Pacific were "of the utmost transcendent importance" to the United States was indicative of such a review.[42]

Such a review however, brought out a sharp division of views within the National Security Council. Vice-President Richard Nixon, Dulles and Radford reportedly believed that Indo-China must not be allowed to fall into the Communist hands as this would set in motion a series of attacks on other areas. On the other hand Army Chief of Staff Ridgway opposed this approach. In his view such a war would be a "tragic adventure" for the United States. Maxwell Taylor who succeeded General Ridgway as the Army Chief of Staff in 1955, credited the latter for having averted an intervention in Vietnam. He believed that it was "largely through General Ridgway's efforts, the fact was eventually accepted that any intervention by that time would be either too late, too little, or of the wrong kind."[43] Taylor himself found the reasons for this argument against intervention in the lack of ready military forces with conventional weapons which alone could cope with this kind of limited war situation.[44]

The President too was strongly opposed to any such war with Communist China in Vietnam. He was determined not to go alone in any such military action without the British and other Western allies; nor was he prepared to become involved militarily in any foreign conflict without the prior approval of the Congress. As Sherman Adams who was the Assistant to the President at this time, had put it, "he had enough trouble convincing some Senators" in the case of the dispatch of even air force technicians.[45] Hence somewhere at this time the National Security Council arrived at a compromise decision that the United States should prevent the loss of Vietnam at all costs, if necessary even by direct intervention. But such an action should be an allied venture and should be accompanied by the French granting complete independence so as to eliminate the issue of colonialism.[46] Following this decision the United States rejected another French appeal, this time through the American Ambassador to France Douglas C. Dillion, for an American air attack to relieve Dien Bien Phu.[47] On 29 March in an address before the Overseas Press Club, Dulles made this latest decision of the NSC public. He said the United States should not "passively" accept Red Chinese control of South-East Asia but should meet this aggression with "united action." He warned that this course might involve "serious risks."[48]

The 29 March speech of Dulles represented the latest position of United States which marked a distinct departure from the past.

Coming within a week after his statement of 23 March wherein he defended the Navarre Plan, this address indicated the new American thinking that the Plan might not save the situation. It also showed that the United States, for the first time, had decided to work actively for pulling Vietnam out of the fire, opening thereby the possibility of direct intervention. Finally the speech indicated a new strategy of "united action" primarily by parties which were under direct threat of attack. President Eisenhower, in a Press Conference on 31 March, confirmed and expanded on this theme. He clarified that such a "united action" in Vietnam would go beyond the local threat posed at Dien Bien Phu and deal directly with the general threat of Chinese aid, the local situation being taken care of by the French.[49]

Politics of "United Action"

The Dulles' speech of 29 March created a widespread reaction within the United States. The American Congress and the public were deeply divided about its implications and expressed a variety of opinions on whether the United States should intervene or not. It revived once again the debate on direct intervention in the Vietnamese War—this time on a still higher gear. With a view to mollify the Congressional opinion and to seek wider prior support, the President convened a secret meeting on 3 April of eight Congressmen (3 Republicans and 5 Democrats, of whom five were senators). Dulles described the aim of the meeting as that of seeking a joint resolution by Congress to permit the President to use air and naval power in Vietnam.[50] The Administration presented the viewpoint, that the United States might not use the land forces (though it did not commit itself on this point) but would confine itself to "Operation Vulture" using mainly the air force. Dulles hinted that such ground forces as needed would be supplied by the Allies.[51] He believed that such an airstrike might not be resorted to actually as even a mere joint resolution by the Congress authorizing its use might deter the Chinese Communists. The Congressional leaders, however, were not convinced that the United States should intervene directly. Instead they laid down three conditions for any American action, as being preliminary to any Congressional support.

1. It should be part of a coalition to include the other free nations of South-East Asia, the Philippines, and the British Commonwealth;

2. The French must agree to accelerate their independence programme for the Associated States so that there could be no interpretation that United States assistance meant support of French colonialism;
3. The French must agree not to pull their forces out of the war if we put our forces in.[52]

Following this conditional support by the Congress leaders, the Administration proceeded to take necessary steps to prepare the public opinion both at home and abroad in favour of such an intervention. On 5 April, in a statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Dulles said that the Chinese support of the Viet Minh effort had reached new heights. He alleged that the Chinese personnel were not merely at the war fronts but were active participants in the war. At the same time, he presented a hopeful picture of both the Navarre Plan as well as French military strength thereby justifying the usefulness of a possible American action.[53] This American confidence and its decision on conditional intervention were reiterated by the President himself in a Press Conference two days after this. He referred in this to the "falling domino" concept and called Indo-China as the first domino. If the communists knocked it out, it would be followed by the collapse of Burma, Thailand, Malaya, and Indonesia. It might even topple America's island defence chain of Japan, Formosa and the Philippines and pose a threat to the entire Pacific. The fall of Indo-China hence would mean "the beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influence."[54] Though this view of Indo-China's importance was not new to the Department of State, it was for the first time officially described as the philosophical basis of a possible American intervention. It was also a public expression of the American strategic planning as worked out by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Pentagon.[55]

The American President also took steps to seek the co-operation of its allies in this venture. On 4 April in a letter to the British Prime Minister, he spelt out the American thinking on this and appealed to him to join in an "ad hoc grouping" consisting of United States, United Kingdom, France, the Associated States, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines.[56] The United States also informed the French on the necessity to form a coalition of states in order to prevent the Communist hope for a victory before the Geneva Conference. Dulles made it clear to the

French Ambassador that such a coalition should be capable of swift action and should issue a joint warning to the Chinese similar to the one issued after the Korean truce agreement by the sixteen nations.[57]

However, the reactions of the Allies to the American proposals were cool. Churchill in his brief reply showed that he was not enthusiastic about joining the United States in taking a firm position.[58] The British viewed that such a policy was "unrealistic" as the conditions for a favourable situation in Vietnam no longer existed.[5] The British Foreign Secretary felt "to form and proclaim a defensive coalition before we went to the Conference table would be unlikely to help us militarily and would harm us politically, by frightening off important political allies."[60] He also was of the view that "a warning would not have any effect as China was already engaged in the war."[61]

As for the French, the proposal of united action meant a change in the mode of "Operation Vulture." From being a joint Franco-American venture, it would now move into a multi-national operation. This in turn meant a certain delay in its implementation at a time when the French were keen to bring a quick blow before the Geneva Conference began. The French also believed any "united action" or declaration of a multi-national warning would prejudice the chances of concluding an acceptable armistice at Geneva.[62] The French continued to believe the war should be essentially under their control and direction and this would not be possible with a coalition of nations. The French also viewed this proposal as born out of an underestimation of the French people's desire for peace and an exploitation of the French backing for a joint air action.[63] The strong public resentment against American pressure was evidenced by the flurry of activities in the French National Assembly. It led to frequent interpellations of the Government on their intentions and future moves. In his statements made in response to these questionings, the Prime Minister reiterated that France stood by its pledge to seek peace through negotiations at Geneva. The French could accept a limited US air attack in Dien Bien Phu, he said, but rejected "united action" as incompatible with a total effort at obtaining a negotiated settlement.[64]

These differences with the Allies necessitated a quick trip by Secretary Dulles to London and Paris in order to persuade the latter to see the American viewpoint, "a mission of peace through stren-

gth",[65] as Dulles called it. The proposal which Dulles carried in his packet was much milder than what he had advocated earlier. The Secretary had dropped the proposal for a declaration warning Communist China with the threat of the use of force and had returned to the bare essentials of 4 April decisions.[66] Dulles found the British adamant in their stand against intervention. The British put forward three objections for a united action : (i) The issue of Indo-China could not be solved by military means alone and the West should wait and see what proposals the Communists had to make at Geneva; (ii) If an intervention were to take place, the British Chiefs of Staff did not believe it would be confined to air and naval operations; (iii) If an intervention were to take place, the projected coalition should include India.[67] On the other hand the British gave their conditional support to the plans for a South-East Asia collective defence organization.[68] The British believed such an arrangement should include India and the other Asian Commonwealth countries. This was, however, unpalatable to Dulles who believed the inclusion of India would give rise to demands in the United States to include Formosa and Japan as well.[69] The Communique which was finally issued on 13 April reflected these Anglo-American differences of opinion. While avoiding any reference to India, it was silent on the issue of "united action" and expressed agreement for "an examination of the possibility of collective defence."[70] Dulles' "united action" proposal did not fare much better in Paris. The French also practically followed the British line of thinking, and preferred limited American assistance to a total entanglement in "united action."[71]

This British opposition and French reluctance to agree for united action have been, however, contradicted by accounts originating from other American sources. Eisenhower, in his *Mandate for Change* has stated that Dulles thought that the Communique on his talks with Eden had "indicated a large measure of acceptance of our view of the danger and necessity for united action."[72] Eisenhower also called Dulles' trip as one which achieved "apparent progress in Paris and London", though he went ahead and described the areas of disagreement. Sherman Adams thought that Dulles returned to Washington with confidence that the British "seemed well disposed to joining the Americans in an effort to stop Communist aggression."[73] Adams added that Bidault too gave him "a reluctant agreement".

Dulles himself expressed a similar view of British willingness to join the "united action." In an address to the Los Angeles

World Affairs Council on 11 June 1954, Dulles said, "I went to Europe on this mission and it seemed that there was agreement on our proposal. But when we moved to translate that proposal into reality, some of the parties held back because they had concluded that any steps to create a united defence should await the results of the Geneva Conference."[74] Dulles repeated this belief of his in a later interview to *Life* on 11 January 1956. He stated then that he obtained in London and Paris what he "thought was an agreement on united action" which he "had hoped to get...into force promptly and before the Geneva Conference was held."[75]

These two contrary interpretations point to a possible misunderstanding between Washington and London. This misunderstanding of the British position was confirmed by the convening of a meeting of the ambassadors of nine nations in Washington by the Department of State on 20 April to discuss unified action. However due to British opposition[76] this conference turned into a briefing session on the Geneva Conference. Chalmers Roberts mentions a misunderstanding in the Department of State on the British agreement to the collective defence organization. "Dulles felt this was the 'united front' he wanted", views Roberts, "and that it would lead to 'united action'."[77] Such a misunderstanding might also have been due to a lack of clarity on the part of the British Government itself. Roberts believes that "just what the British did agree to is not clear, apparently, not even to them." It looked, Dulles' trip had not yielded anything more than a setback for the Administration and a personal rebuff to him.

However what looked like a collapse of the American proposal of "united action", was averted by the events in Dien Bien Phu which steadily deteriorated. On 22 April, when the Foreign Ministers of Western European countries had assembled for a NATO Council meeting in Paris, the French Government received a cable from General Navarre to the effect that only a massive air attack within the next seventy-two hours could save Dien Bien Phu, the alternative being a cease-fire. Such an air strike which would be on the basis of 'Operation Vulture' would mean massive B-29 bombing, from US bases outside Indo-China. The French, in passing on the request to the United States, expressed readiness to even internationalise the war if America would act to save the fortress.

What exactly was the immediate reaction of Dulles and the US Administration to this third appeal from France, is a matter of

controversy and borders on utter vagueness. According to the American sources like Eisenhower's account and Donovan's narration, the United States decided not to intervene. Its decision was due to more than one reason : (1) The reluctance of Britain to join in any such action and that would mean a Congressional disapproval, and (2) The United States viewed that the situation was too gloomy to be saved by a mere air strike. Even Admiral Radford who had initially favoured intervention, now opposed it as in his view, the battle lines were becoming so indistinguishable as to make an air attack ineffective.[78] It was also felt that 72 hours was too short a period for the President to reach the Congress and ask for a declaration of war. The United States also came round to believe that the fall of Dien Bien Phu did not necessarily mean the loss of Indo-China. It viewed the French were magnifying its importance beyond reality and was worried that a defeat at Dien Bien Phu might mean a French withdrawal from entire Indo-China.[79] While the French were keen to save Dien Bien Phu, the United States had already given it up as a lost battle and had begun to look beyond it to the future of Indo-China. Its repeated efforts to get the British consent and participation even at this late hour, could be explained only in this way.

British sources, however, presented a contrary account of the American intentions and policy during this crucial period. According to Sir Anthony Eden's account, both Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford were keen to exploit the French offer for an intervention, the only hitch being the President's insistence that Britain should agree to go along. Eden did not agree with the American version that the French morale was at a low ebb, that the military situation was so desperate that the French would withdraw if Dien Bien Phu fell. According to Eden's account, again, the United States was fully prepared with a plan for Presidential action so as to bring about the strike on 28 April and also with a letter of intentions to be signed by the Washington ambassadors of the eight nations for such a joint venture.[80] He has recorded that even the French Foreign Minister was not convinced about the need for American intervention and that it was only the intense American pressure brought upon the French that made them consent to American intervention and seek the British consent for the same. Hence according to Eden's account, the credit for having prevented an expansion of the war on the day the Geneva Conference opened, went squarely to Britain.[81]

Domestic Uproar

These two contradictory accounts present a confusing picture of the American stand on intervention. The confusion could be mainly traced to the fact that most of the accounts like those of Eisenhower, Eden, Adams, Donovan, were written many years after the events and hence they were attempts to defend and justify one individual or the other. Eisenhower's account attempts to stress the view that basically he was opposed to intervention and that he would not have let the United States intervene, unless it could carry both the allies and the American Congress. His book, however, does not indicate any difference of opinion between himself and his Secretary of State. Eden's memoirs too do not refer to any such difference in the approach but only in favour of intervention. However there are other accounts like those of Adams and Donovan, which maintain that such a difference did exist between the two. Sherman Adams contends that "the hard and uncompromising line that the United States Government took towards Soviet Russia and Red China between 1953 and the early months of 1954 was more a Dulles line than an Eisenhower one."[82] Eisenhower deferred to the tougher stand of Dulles in foreign policy, he says in another place, "because he agreed with his Secretary of State that the United States had to be more positive in its dealings with the Communists."[83] As an illustration to this difference in approach, Adams cites the Indo-Chinese developments of April 1954.

Secretary Dulles, referring to these critical days, had said in his interview with James Shepley on 11 January 1956, that the United States was on the brink of war and that it was only the strong and courageous action of the President and Department of State which helped in averting the American involvement in the Indo-Chinese war.[84] Sherman Adams, however, does not agree with this version. He wrote :

> There is no clear evidence (to show) that we were teetering on the brink at Geneva in the bold front that Dulles contended saved half of Indo-China from the Communists. The President knew that the American people had no appetite for another prolonged war in South-East Asia. He was determined not to become involved without the participation of the British, and neither Congress nor the British wanted to fight in Indo-China.[85]

If Adams is to be believed, the Dulles policy of deterrence was not even put to a crucial test in Indo-China, as the latter had claimed. He however added that had the Communists "pushed on with an aggressive offensive after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, instead of stopping and agreeing to stay out of Southern Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, there was a strong possibility that the United States would have moved against them." "A complete Communist conquest of Indo-China", Sherman Adams reflected, "would have had far graver consequences for the West than a Red victory in Korea."[86] Robert Donovan too agrees with this interpretation. In his view in the circumstances in April 1954 "the sum of his (President's) influence...tended away from rather than toward military intervention of any kind."[87]

On the other hand, there are other accounts which hold that the confusion was caused by the differences within the National Security Council. According to most accounts, Admiral Radford, Vice-President Nixon and Under Secretary Bedell Smith supported intervention, in unison with allies if possible, but unilateral if necessary. In contrast to this all the Chiefs of Staff were completely opposed to any sort of military involvement. The position of Dulles himself was not very clear and has led to conflicting accounts. Victor Bator in his book logically argues that Dulles was opposed to unilateral intervention, was indifferent to 'Operation Vulture' and most unresponsive to Ely's requests during the latter's visit in March. The rejection of the second French request for intervention on 4 April is also credited by Bator to Dulles (though according to Donovan, Dulles refused it because he knew very well that "Eisenhower was dead set against intervention of any kind without Congressional approval"). Bator also develops the idea that Dulles was the sole author of the proposal of "united action." In this context he calls the 29 March speech of Dulles as "the occasion to kill the Ely-Radford Plan of intervention and introduce his own general foreign policy line".[88] The concept of "united action"' Bator adds, was "the vehicle on which Dulles' opposition against the Radford-Ely Plan rode to success." However, the main basis of difference between the two approaches was not the aggressive or bellicose nature of unilateral intervention as against the more conciliatory form of collective action. The Radford Plan talked in terms of a small scale, short term military operation, while the Dulles' united action aimed at a military victory and would have internationalised the war. Whereas the

Radford Plan would have meant supporting French colonialism, Dulles' united action would have made it into a respectable anti-Communist war and made Vietnam a part and parcel of America's overall foreign policy. Bator also believes that initially President Eisenhower supported the Radford Plan for aerial intervention. It was Dulles' political arguments plus the strong disapproval by the Congressmen that made Eisenhower change his mind and approve Dulles policy which aimed at a "far-sighted comprehensive, long-range operation."[89]

Joseph Buttinger, a close observer of the Indo-Chinese affairs, reaches a different conclusion. He is of the view that the Secretary of State along with Vice-President and Joint Chiefs of Staff, supported intervention.[90]

In the Leftist circles in the United States, Dulles was considered to be a virulent interventionist. According to the *Federated Press*, Dulles' 29 March speech was nothing but "the war cry" of "a premier Wall Street Corporation lawyer", acting for the big business and all reactionary forces in the United States.[91]

There is, however, another aspect to the question of intervention; even if the President had adopted a clear-cut decision in favour of intervention, would he have been in a position to implement it? Would the Congress have approved intervention if the President had asked for its support? Chalmers Roberts is of the view, the Congress would have, in the end, done what Eisenhower asked, provided he had asked for it forcefully and explained the facts and their relation to the national interests of the United States.[92]

The *New York Times* too believed that although there was "profound resistance in the Senate" to intervention, this might weaken given certain conditions, including the actual or imminent collapse of resistance, an indication of support from the allies and a good measure of success for the Administration's efforts to make the country see the danger.[93]

However there is much evidence to point the other way. Influential Congressmen belonging to both the parties looked with disfavour on the prospects of a new Korea. According to *Christian Science Monitor* there were not more than five men in the Capitol Hill who supported unequivocally a decisive intervention.[94] This was evidenced by the various proposals like the Bricker Amendment and an attempt by Representative Frederick R. Conder, Jr., on 15 April to add a rider to the Defence Appropriation Bill which, if accept-

ed, would have limited the powers of the President to send troops anywhere in the world without the consent of the Congress. The debate in the Congress on 6 April also proved the intense opposition by the Congress.

As for the public opinion, a Gallop poll in March showed 85 per cent as being against American involvement in Indo-China.[95] The American Government found it difficult to bring around the American public to support an intervention. This was evidenced by the adverse reaction to a supposedly off-the-record remark by Vice-President Nixon on 16 April at the convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. "If in order to avoid further Communist expansion in Asia and particularly in Indo-China", he said in answering a question, "if in order to avoid it we must take the risk now by putting American boys in, I believe that the Executive Branch has to take the politically unpopular position of facing up to it and doing it, and I personally would support such a decision."[96] The statement was interpreted as an expression of the American decision for unilateral intervention in Indo-China. It caused a furore among the public and invited a huge Congressional mail, indicating their disapproval of another war, with all that it implied. Nixon was damned in Congress for whooping it up for war."[97] This brought forth a denial by Dulles who said that the use of American soldiers in South-East Asia was "unlikely".[98] Nixon himself was forced to withdraw his remarks; he said later that the aim of the United States was to avoid involvement if possible and seek an "honourable and peaceful settlement" of the crisis at Geneva.[99]

American business and labour circles too were divided on the issue of intervention. In general the business and financial press predicted an early intervention by the United States. Both *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* reported that buying of tin, copper, lead, zinc and rubber bordered on the panicky, based on fears that the war in Vietnam might develop into another Korea. The speculative circles which stood to gain, naturally approved intervention. The *Magazine of Wall Street* approved the "tough talking" of Dulles. The *Federated Press* hinted darkly that Wall Street had voted for a unilateral intervention even if the Allies refused to go along. According to it, the motives behind this plea for intervention were not only the increase in the speculative trade, but also the need for raw material and the increasing dependence for important metals.[100]

A re-examination of the "New Look Policy" was suggested by A.F.L. President, George Meany. On 12 April he called for sending

more American troops to Europe and Asia, for substantially increasing military aid for Indo-China and to end economies in military expenditure. He opposed the Geneva Conference as appeasement of aggression and a blow to the camp of peace.[101]

On the other hand some of the local labour unions opposed the interventionist policies of the Administration. The Ford Local 600 of the United Auto Workers believed that the Republican Administration was talking of an Indo-Chinese intervention in order to create artificial prosperity.[102] There were other local unions like the Annual International Union of Mine Mill and Smelters Workers Wage Policy Conference in Denver, the Armour, Swift and Wilson Co. Packinghouse Workers of Chicago, the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers in Louisville, Ky., and the local 758 of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers which opposed an American intervention in the Vietnamese war. They even sought assurances that no American would be sent to the war.

Hence on the whole, but for a few business and financial circles and a section within the military as represented by Radford, any direct military intervention was generally opposed in the United States. In the face of this, the American idea of "united action" collapsed on 25 April. On 26 April, the day the Geneva Conference was inaugurated, the American President traced the future policy of the Government. In a meeting with the Congressional leaders the President said the United States was not going to carry the rest of the world on its back. He also said the United States would not send its ground troops independently nor was it going to be involved alone in a power move against the Russians.[103] As for the American attitude to the Conference itself, the President said in a press conference, the aim was "to arrive at some situation that at least we could call a *modus vivendi*."[104] This *modus vivendi*, he explained in a subsequent press conference (29 April), was a middle path as between the unacceptable (Communist conquest of the entire region) and the unattainable (a firm, stable relationship with the Communists). At the same time the United States kept the door open for an American entry into the war, if the need arose in the future. The President told the legislative leaders when he met them on 26 April, that there might be some possibility in the future that some US units might become involved.

It was with this perspective that the United States entered into the Geneva Conference, reconciled to an arrangement across the table.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate For Change* (London, 1963 p. 341.
2. *Federated Press* (Special Collection, Columbia University New York), 12 February 1954.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. *New York Times*, 12 February 1954.
6. As printed in the U.S., *Congressional Record* (Washington, D.C.), vol. 100, 9 February 1954, p. 1460.
7. Ibid., 8 February 1954, p. 1445.
8. Ibid., 9 February 1954, p. 1470.
9. Ibid., 16 February 1954, p. A 1246.
10. Sir Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London, 1960), p. 87.
11. *New York Times*, 11 February 1954.
12. Richard P. Stebbins, *The United States in World Affairs, 1954* (New York, 1956), p. 218.
13. Eisenhower, n: 1, p. 340.
14. *New York Times*, 11 February 1954.
15. In a press conference on 10 March 1954; *The Hindu* (Madras), 12 March 1954.
16. U.S., Senate, 83 Cong., sess. 2, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, *Foreign Policy and Its Relation to Military Programs* (Washington, D.C., 1954), p. 26.
17. Stebbins, n. 12.
18. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 344.
19. *New York Times*, 10 February 1954.
20. Ibid., 24 March 1954.
21. *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 February 1954.
22. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 344.
23. Ibid.
24. Eisenhower in a cable to Dulles on 10 February, Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 343.
26. *New York Times*, 22 February 1954.
27. Alexander Werth, *France 1940-1955* (London, 1956), pp. 601-2. Douglas Pike too, in his book, refers to such a deal between the French and the Russians, though he puts the timing of such a deal to sometime during the Geneva Conference. Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p. 52.
28. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 343.
29. Dulles in a broadcast speech on 24 February. *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.), 8 March 1954, pp. 345-6. This source is referred hereafter as *Bulletin*.
30. *New York Times*, 23 February 1954.
31. Eden, n. 10, p. 90.
32. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 343. Dulles too referred to these warnings, U.S., Senate, 83 Cong., sess. 2, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, *Mutual Security Act of 1954* (Washington, D.C., 1954), p. 32.

33. Navarre in his book *Agonie de l'Indochina* (Paris, 1950), as cited by Victor Bator, *Vietnam, A Diplomatic Tragedy* (New York, 1965), pp. 20-21.
34. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 343.
35. Dulles, n. 32.
36. Bator, n. 33, p. 30.
37. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 344.
38. For these and the following details, the writer had to depend on secondary sources, as no primary source like Eisenhower's memoirs report on Ely's visit. Both Victor Bator's and Melvin Gurtov's books agree on these details which they have taken from French sources like Paul Ely, *L'Indochine Dans la Tourmente*, Lacourture-Devillers, *La Fin d'une Guerre* and Joseph Laniel, *Le Drama Indochinois*.
39. Melvin Gurtov, *The First Vietnam Crisis* (New York, 1967), p. 79.
40. Ibid., pp. 79-80. Victor Bator, however, gives a slightly different version. According to him on the last day of Ely's stay in Washington Radford told him "that if the French Government requested direct military intervention, the President's *unrestricted instruction opened the possibility of such direct* intervention of American airforce for the saving of Dien Bien Phu. According to Radford this would not appear as a direct act of war, but would be a one run, one hit aid act by aerial forces based in Manila." (Italics by Bator) Bator believes that the Admiral gave Ely to understand that such an intervention was not only a probability but a certain possibility. Bator, n. 33, pp. 32-33. See also for this view, Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We didn't go to War", *The Reporter* (New York), 14 September 1954, p. 32. On the other hand Eisenhower has penned that Dulles had clearly told Ely that such an intervention would not be possible on account of the American prestige that might come to be involved in it. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 345.
41. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 344.
42. Referred by Dulles in a speech, *Bulletin*, 12 April 1954, p. 540.
43. Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York, 1960), p. 24.
44. Ibid.
45. Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report* (New York, 1961), p. 121.
46. Roberts, n. 40, pp. 33-34.
47. Robert J. Donovan, *Eisenhower, The Inside Story* (New York, 1956), p. 264.
48. *Bulletin*, 12 April 1954, p. 540.
49. *New York Times*, 1 April 1954.
50. Chalmers M. Robert's article deals at length with this Conference. Roberts, n. 40.
51. President Eisenhower, however, on the very next day wrote in a letter to Churchill that "the United States would expect to play its full part in such a coalition" and that he did "not envisage the need of any appreciable ground forces on your (British) or our part." Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 347.
52. Ibid.
53. *Bulletin*, 19 April 1953, p. 582.
54. *New York Times*, 8 April 1954.
55. Donovan, n. 47, p. 261.

56. For the text of the letter, Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 347.
57. Gurtov, n. 39, p. 97.
58. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 347.
59. Eden, n. 10, p. 92.
60. Ibid., p. 93.
61. Ibid.
62. In a reply handed over to Dulles on 8 April. Gurtov, n. 39, p. 100.
63. *Le Monde*, 10 April 1954.
64. Gurtov, n. 39, p. 104.
65. *Bulletin*, 19 April 1954, p. 590.
66. Ibid. Eden also refers to this modification of American stand. Eden, n. 10, p. 95.
67. Eden, n. 10, p. 95.
68. There is no prior reference to this plan for collective security organization, which later took the shape of SEATO. It is believable that Dulles came out with the proposal as an alternate to the "united action". This is confirmed by Robert's account. Roberts, n. 40, p. 34.
69. Ibid., pp. 95-98.
70. Peter V. Curl, ed., *Documents on American Foreign Relations 1954* (New York, 1955), pp. 257-8.
71. Ibid., pp. 258-9.
72. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 348.
73. Adams, n. 45, pp. 122-3; as also Donovan, n. 47, p. 265.
74. *Bulletin*, 28 June 1954, p. 972.
75. James Shepley, "How Dulles Averted War", *Life* (New York), 16 January 1956.
76. Dulles attributed this British "change of minds" to "the pressure from Nehru who had very little sympathy with any efforts to assist the French". Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 349.
77. Roberts, n. 40, p. 34.
78. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 251; as also Donovan, n. 47, p. 264.
79. Eisenhower, n. 1, p. 350.
80. Most of Anthony Eden's account is corroborated by Robert's article.
81. Here, however, Robert's account differs slightly. While agreeing with the basic proposition that the United States was willing to act provided it had the British support, Roberts does not talk of any reluctance on the part of the French. Nor does he believe the content of the letter which Dulles delivered to Bidault on 25 April, to be one of asking the French to persuade the British. Instead he mentions that in that letter Dulles expressed the American inability to intervene in the war as such. Robert's account is, however, based only on information he had collected.
82. Adams, n. 45, p. 87.
83. Ibid., p. 88.
84. Shepley, n. 75.
85. Adams, n. 45, p. 118.
86. Ibid., p. 120.
87. Donovan, n. 47, p. 267.
88. Bator, n. 33, p. 38.

89. Ibid., pp. 35-50.
90. Joseph Buttinger, "The Miracle of Vietnam", in Richard W. Lindholm, *Vietnam : The First Five Years* (East Lansing, 1959), p. 13.
91. *Federated Press*, 2 April 1954 and 21 April 1954.
92. Roberts, n. 40, p. 35.
93. *New York Times*, 5 April 1954.
94. *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 April 1954. This would have included Senator Style Bridges (Democrat, New Hamsphire) who even suggested bringing pressure on America's allies by withholding appropriations for the programmes, Senator Knowland and other conservative Republicans.
95. *U.S. News & World Report*, 7 May 1954.
96. *New York Times*, 18 April 1954.
97. Adams, n. 45, p. 85.
98. *New York Times*, 20 April 1954.
99. Ibid., 21 April 1954. Various interpretations have been given to Nixon's "off-the-record" remarks. Secretary Dulles in his denial of any intervention by the United States brushed it aside as "a perfectly legitimate and personal" opinion. Sherman Adams confirms this when he reports of a telephonic conversation between Nixon and Eisenhower who was then in Augusta. Adams, n. 45. On the other hand the statement has been read, as a trial balloon by Nixon to test the public opinion in the changed circumstances. Sherman Adams himself supports this when he wrote, that "in that uncomfortable April 1954, the U.S. had to make some kind of threat of armed intervention, whether the American people wanted it or not. The Defence Department and the National Security Council were worried about the possibilities of French surrender or pull out." Ibid., pp., 121-2. A third interpretation calls the statement as evidence of the difference of opinion in the higher echelons on unilateral intervention. While Nixon was a supporter of it Dulles opposed unilateral intervention and favoured united action. Bator, n. 33, pp. 41-42. The State Department's rejoinder issued on the same day, confirms this. It read : "He was stating a course of possible action which he was personally prepared to support under a highly unlikely hypothesis." *New York Times*, 18 April 1954.
100. *Federated Press*, 2 April 1954 and 14 May 1954.
101. As reported by *Federated Press*, ibid., 9 April 1954.
102. Ibid., 12 April 1954.
103. Adams, n. 45, p. 123.
104. *Bulletin*, 10 May 1954, p. 703.

VII

Compromise or Convenience

The Geneva Conference of 26 April on the two Far Eastern issues of Korea and Indo-China could not have started under more unfavourable circumstances for the West. It came just a day after France made a desperate but vain attempt to get American help in a last bid to hold Dien Bien Phu. The failure of this attempt which led to a loss of French nerves, highlighted the disunity among the Big Three in the Western camp on the issue of "united action" in Vietnam. To this disunity among the Big Three were added the continuing strained relations between France and the Associated States on the issue of independence. These factors had already forecast the shape of things to come. This was heightened by the fall of Dien Bien Phu on 1 May. Though not unexpected, it cast a shadow on the Conference proceedings when the discussions on Indo-China started the next day.

The United States approached the Conference in a mood of resignation. It was clear that the United States did not expect anything much out of the Conference by way of a permanent settlement or solution to the problem. The American Secretary of State John Foster

Dulles himself mentioned this clearly when he said on 11 May in reference to the unification of Vietnam, "we never thought that there was a good chance of accomplishing those results."[1] The Administration was reconciled to the best available settlement in the existing circumstances, one which would be "on terms which do not endanger the freedom of the people of Vietnam" nor "provide a road to a Communist aggression.[2] Its mainaim was to see that the Viet Minh did not gain more than what they actually held and it would be quite satisfied as Dulles put it, "as long as they don't lead us to make any costly concession which we do not intend to make."[3]

With this aim which was obviously a limited one, the United States chose for itself a comparatively minor role in the Conference. The United States repeatedly stressed that it was "playing primarily the role of a friend which gives advice when it is asked for...", the primary responsibility for the negotiations being carried by the countries participating in the fighting in the area, viz., France and the Associated States.[4] With the United States abdicating its leading role and the French eager for a quick settlement, the British delegation led by Anthony Eden came to assume an important role on the Western side.

This attitude of detachment from the Conference was also demonstrated by the casual manner in which the United States participated in the Conference proceedings. Secretary Dulles left the Conference after five days of its start and his place was taken by Under Secretary Bedell Smith, while all other member nations continued to be represented by their foreign ministers. Even this participation was withdrawn on 21 June and the American delegation was "downgraded to an observer mission" under a diplomat of lesser rank. It was only on 17 July that Bedell Smith returned to Geneva.

This posture of indifference to what was happening in Geneva could be traced to a shift in the American official thinking on the strategic importance of Indo-China. The United States no longer believed that Indo-China was essential to the security of the free world—a reversal of the Domino Theory. While it was important to save the Dien Bien Phu fortress, a defeat at the battle would not mean the loss of Indo-China. From this the next step was easier; that if the Indo-Chinese States were to be lost for the West this might not mean the loss of entire South-East Asia. Secretary Dulles explained this viewpoint on 11 May as follows : "...what we are trying to do is to create a situation in South-East Asia where the

domino situation will not apply." "But," he added, "I do not want to give the impression either that if events that we could not control and which we do not anticipate should lead to their being lost, that we would consider the whole situation hopeless, and we would give up in despair."[5] Continuing in the same vein, he said the purpose of collective security was "to save all of South-East Asia if it can be saved; if not, to save essential parts of it." Explaining this further, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were not "essential parts" as they were poor and thinly settled.[6] Speaking on the same day, President Eisenhower affirmed the same point when he said that the United States was engaged in trying to create a situation in South-East Asia where the domino situation will not apply.[7] Through united action, he added the next day, "the United States was seeking to build a row of dominoes strong enough to withstand the fall of one."[8] This meant the United States continued with its efforts to get a South-East Asia collective security system formulated, though now with a slightly modified purpose.

At the same time, however, the United States could not publicly display its reconciliation with a compromising settlement at Geneva. It had to keep up its interests in the developments which were taking place in Indo-China. The fall of Dien Bien Phu, by weakening the French position, led to the revival of the demand for intervention among the conservative Republicans and the "China lobby." This section of public opinion had already been criticizing the Administration on its decision to participate in the Geneva Conference. Any settlement at Geneva short of a total victory over the Communists—even a fairly favourable and compromising one—might be denounced by this section as appeasement. The Administration and the nation at large, were especially sensitive to the criticism that any agreement with the the Communists would lead to a recognition of Communist China. Hence the Administration while reconciled to a settlement at Geneva, had to keep up the appearance of being opposed to it.

The United States also found the need to bolster the French morale and strengthen their hands in Geneva. With the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the possibility of a French withdrawal from the war became nearly certain. Hence American actions were now directed to help the French keep up the fighting until the Conference might reach an honourable settlement. Another French defeat (as it looked dangerously imminent in the Red River Delta) would mean a French surrender and

a complete Communist victory, both politically and militarily. The United States in order to keep the Communists in Geneva guessing and the French in Vietnam fighting, pursued a militant diplomacy with its allies and maintained a high-pitched debate at home, by authentic rumours, on the likelihood of active intervention.

These two purposes which led to an aggressive posture on the part of the Administration had to be, however, reconciled to another equally strong political pressure at home, namely the one which was opposed to any involvement in an Asian war. This necessitated a series of public statements from the President, Secretary of State and other officials of the Administration qualifying and limiting intervention. It was stated from time to time that the United States would not intervene unless certain publicised conditions were fulfilled. On 12 May, in a closed session with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Dulles expressed the view "unless full independence was assured to the Associated States and unless the United Nations could be brought into the picture to clarify the moral issues, the issues would not be those on which the United States could be asked to send troops."[9] These conditions were confirmed by Dulles himself in a news conference on 25 May when he said "such an intervention (a) should be in defence of liberty and freedom and not colonialism, (b) it should have the participation of other states who had an important stake in the area, and (c) it should have the moral sanction of the U.N." Dulles stressed that these conditions had been "stable and unchanging over a considerable period of time."[10] To these were added two more conditions by 11 June viz. (1) an invitation from the present lawful authorities, and (2) an assurance that France would not itself withdraw from the battle until it is won."[11] Over and above all of them was the need to get the Congressional approval. Thus as the Conference was being prolonged and the military situation intensified, the American conditions for involvement also increased. This clearly demonstrated that the United States was keen to avoid any contingency of an active involvement. Since the possibility of all these conditions being fulfilled was remote, it looked, as if the American aim was more to prevent a hasty involvement than to really "save" entire Indo-China for the "Free World."

Birth Pangs of the Pact

These mutually incompatible pressures on the Administration towards conflicting aims, resulted in apparently contradictory state-

ments and activities during this period. It presented a confusing picture of American diplomacy. In this confusion, one thing stood out very clearly. The American Administration was convinced that the formation of a coalition of forces or even serious discussions on it, was the only way out of the situation. If such a collective security pact could be arrived at, it could be presented as a proof that the interests of the "Free World" had not been sacrificed in South-East Asia. This explained to some extent, the American eagerness to conclude such an arrangement even during the Conference, whereas the British viewed that any such pact would lead to a break in the negotiation and therefore could be discussed only after the Conference.

The United States resumed its efforts in this direction during the very first meetings at Geneva. Dulles' efforts to persuade the British yielded some fruit, and on 30 April the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden delivered to Dulles an eight-point memorandum on South-East Asia defence. The eighth point of this memorandum suggested "immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defence for South-East Asia, namely, (a) nature and purpose, (b) membership, and (c) commitments."[12] This British concession, which meant more as a gesture of reconciliation than a policy decision, did not satisfy the United States. The British suggestion was for a Five Power Staff Agency of the "White" nations, while the United States desired a political coalition of South-East Asian countries. However, Washington interpreted this as a change in the British position and was encouraged to go ahead with its proposal of a coalition of forces. Hence, following the fall of Dien Bien Phu to the Communists in the beginning of May, the American Government spelt out the conditions under which such an intervention could take place. These conditions were substantially the same as those publicised later by Dulles on 11 June. The only two additional points in the American instructions to its Ambassador in France were—and these were important—(a) agreement be reached on American participation in training native troops and working out a command structure for united action, and (b) all these conditions should not only be accepted by the Freneh Cabinet, but also by the French National Assembly. The United States was prepared even to meet a counter-intervention by Communist China as well as to intervene even without the British co-operation if necessary.[13]

According to Eisenhower's account, it was the French reluctance to grant complete independence to the Associated States and to let the United States involve its ground troops substantially, that defeated the American proposal for united action at this time. The French believed that a change in the military command in Vietnam with a token help of one or two divisions of American ground troops would help in preventing the rest of Indo-China, more especially the Red River Delta from being over-run. On the other hand the United States insisted on the political atmosphere being first improved.[14]

The French whose anxiety to arrive at some settlement increased in proportion to the deteriorating military situation, felt that a fulfilment of American conditions would not only prolong the war but might even expand it by inviting Chinese intervention. The apparently tough attitude of Washington, its apparent willingness to risk a Chinese participation and its decision to adopt an offensive strategy in case of such a contingency had made the political leadership in France hesitant to respond to American conditions.

This French reluctance, in a way, helped the United States in avoiding any action on its own decisions. The United States was not eager to commit itself, especially when, according to the information it was receiving, the war situation was very discouraging. In the first week of June, the Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson had returned from a three week tour of the Far East and his report on Indo-China was not very encouraging.[15] This was confirmed by General Van Fleet who toured Indo-China at this time as the President's personal representative with the rank of Ambassador. He however recommended that the United States should be prepared to enter the Indo-China war.[16] On the other hand, the Army Chief of Staff General Ridgway, on the basis of the report by a team of experts whom he had sent to Indo-China, had concluded that any American action would mean a major military commitment.

At the same time the United States continued its pressure on the French to hold on to the Red River Delta which looked like being vacated by them soon. It was under the American pressure that the French Cabinet decided on 29 May to request the National Assembly's approval to send conscripts to Indo-China—a decision politically most distasteful in France. It was, however, welcomed by the United States.[17] The United States also welcomed the appointment of General Paul Ely to the dual post of French Commissioner-General in Indo-China and Commander-in-Chief of French

Union forces in that area. In Eisenhower's opinion, Ely "was in favour of a strong stand in defence of the Red River Delta."[18]

In the absence of any serious consideration of an American involvement, Franco-American conversations could be interpreted as an attempt to pressurize the British to agree to an early formation of the proposed defence pact. This is evident from the fact that these talks which were meant to be secret and were possibly unknown to even Bedell Smith, were leaked to the Press. Newspapers carried the reports on these talks on 16 May. The United States also kept the British in the dark not only on the nature and content of these talks but their very existence. According to Anthony Eden's account the British came to know about it only through newspapers.[19] The United States also intensified the pressure by proclaiming openly that if the British were not willing to go along with the formation of the defence pact, the United States would proceed without Britain. In a news conference on 19 May, President Eisenhower said that with Australia, New Zealand and several other Asian countries, an effective South-East Asia pact could be built without the support of Britain, even if it were not as satisfactory as he would desire.[20] The American Administration probably believed that it could use the ANZUS Pact to obtain the consent of Australia and New Zealand to join the new pact. With this in view, Eisenhower had asked France to formally request the ANZUS Powers for help in the Indo-Chinese war. The United States hoped with the participation of Thailand and the Philippines which had already expressed their willingness, as also the ANZUS Powers "the United Kingdom would either participate or be acquiescent."[21]

It is doubtful, however, how far this "diplomacy by *fait accompli*" was successful. Not only did Britain and other Commonwealth countries deny any rift among them, it also led to a widespread resentment in Britain with the American tactics and the defence pact. The British reiterated that its position remained unchanged. This led to further strains in the Anglo-American relations and a greater disunity in the Allied ranks.

The American talks of intervention with the much publicised conditions attached to it, also led to defeat of American aims in another direction. The US activities became the principal ground for the Opposition attacks in the French National Assembly during

the month of May and led finally to the defeat of Laniel's Government on 12 June. It was replaced by a Government led by Mendes-France who pledged himself to a negotiated settlement by 20 July. With the formation of Mendes-France's Government the American offers of intervention had an automatic death. On 18 June, the American President renewed the offer in a letter to President Rene Coty of France. In it he had stated "I want to assure you that the pledge of support embodied in my message of April 16 to Monsieur Laniel still stands, and will continue (sic) available to his successor."[22] This offer was, however, rejected by Mendes-France who was keen on immediate negotiations and preferred to follow his own judgement. This rejection finally closed the doors on American intervention in Vietnam in unison with its allies or unilateral.

As the American offer of an immediate intervention in the Vietnamese war was being given up, the proposals for a defence pact received a boosting by the announcement on 15 June of a visit by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden to Washington. The visit had the main purpose of smoothening Anglo-American relations which had become strained in the recent past. Coming in the midst of a stalemate in Geneva with even the likelihood of a break-up, the announcement sounded as though the British admitted that the Americans were right all along. It was interpreted that Eden was reaching the end of his patience with the negotiations and might even be prepared to talk on unified action.[23] Dulles remarked in a news conference on the same day that "there seems to be some indication that the British feel that the possibilities of Geneva have been exhausted and that the result is sufficiently barren so that alternatives should now be considered." He implied that this might lead to taking decisions on the collective security pact.[24]

These American hopes looked like being confirmed by a letter from Churchill to Eisenhower in mid-June. The British Premier had recommended in this letter the formation of a South-East Asia Treaty Organization, corresponding to NATO.[25]

At the end of the Washington visit of the two British statesmen (25-28 June) two communiques were issued. The communiques primarily reflected an Anglo-American rapprochement on the many issues which had strained their relations. Indo-China happened to be one of them and the reports showed that an overall agreement

could not be reached on this question. The joint communique issued on 28 June mentioned only one area of agreement between the two, viz., that the two parties had agreed "to press forward with plans" to meet the situation of either agreement or non-agreement at Geneva.[26] It was, however, reported that the unwritten part of the agreement upheld the British viewpoint that no action would be taken towards this before 20 July.

Both Eisenhower and Eden have, however, mentioned in their memoirs the formulation of a seven point position jointly arrived by the two nations with regard to the final settlement which the French might arrive with the Communists in Geneva. While the British had "hoped" that these points would be considered by the French, the American authorities insisted that these should form the minimum basis for the settlement.[27]

The seven points included an agreement that Laos and Cambodia would be left as independent states while Vietnam might be partitioned South of the 18th Parallel, that an ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means would be possible and that an effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement be provided for.

This memorandum indicated that the United States had come to a definite conclusion on its stand on some of the proposals before the Geneva Conference. The Administration put forward these seven points as the irreducible minimum if the United States had to "respect an armistice agreement on Indo-China" that might be arrived at Geneva.

Proposals and Reactions

The United States unlike the other countries did not have any particular proposal when it entered the Geneva Conference. It was disposed to give the French the backing they needed without entering into excessive or unfulfillable commitments. Hence the United States confined itself to merely responding to the positions taken by Britain and France.

The American posture of not taking any initiative could be traced to the fact that it was least prepared for a discussion at this stage. The United States had believed that the Conference would be divided into two phases and that it would be the Korean issue which would come up in the first phase. It had desired that the Conference

should pin down the Communists to Korea and that the opening statement of Dulles should be directed to achieve this. It had hoped once the specific problem of Korea was settled, it would enable the other problems to be solved more easily. With this in view, Dulles in his statement on 28 April at the third plenary session confined himself to Korea and made no reference to Indo-China at all. The United States perhaps also hoped that this would give enough time for the French to strengthen their military position. However, contrary to American expectations, the Korean issue was soon overshadowed by the Indo-Chinese question, following the defeat of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May.

In actual practice even the mere presence of the United States had become sufficiently vital for its allies to let it dissociate itself from the Conference proceedings. The American response was important not only because of its aid for the continuation of the war but also because of the fact that without a strong American backing, the position of the West *vis-a-vis* the Communists at Geneva would be considerably weakened.

As the conference started discussions on Indo-China on 8 May, it was faced with a flood of proposals, counter-proposals and compromise formulae. The discussions were inaugurated with a comprehensive set of proposals by the French Foreign Minister Bidault. These were responded by the Viet Minh delegate Pham Van Dong on 10 May, with his own counter-proposals. Two days after this, the South Vietnam delegation submitted a third set of proposals for the consideration of the Conference.[28] The following were some of the important points which formed the core of the various proposals relating specifically to Vietnam.

(1) The question of ceasefire being connected to a political settlement and an armistice agreement. While the French did not link the two, the Viet Minh made a ceasefire dependent on the acceptance of terms for a political settlement.

(2) The regrouping of the forces into two zones as put forward by the French. The USSR and Communist China seemed to favour this while the Viet Minh wanted the lines to be drawn in such a way that they would be free to operate throughout Vietnam. The Vietnamese government, on the other hand, opposed any military division of the country.

(3) All the three sides agreed on an international authority to supervise the armistice agreements, though they differed in its composition and terms of reference.

(4) The question relating to an international guarantee of the settlement.

(5) The proposals for the internal political arrangement in the Indo-Chinese States viz., the proposals for election in all the Associated States with a view to forming a single Government in each one of them. This proposal was put forward by both the Viet Minh and the Vietnamese delegations, though each one had its own purpose to serve.

The initial reaction of the United States to most of these proposals was stiffer than those of Britain and France. It opposed the French proposal for a simple cease-fire without any definite political conditions attached. It believed that any cease-fire should be preceded by "*an acceptable armistice agreement*, including international mechanisms for enforcement". The United States was convinced that any agreement with the communists was not worth the paper it was written on, unless it contained its own self-enforcing procedures. It however concurred in the initiation of negotiations towards an armistice agreement itself.[29]

The United States also opposed the French plan for military regrouping in delimited zones. It believed that such a regrouping would mean nothing but partition. And the partition itself as a proposal had been opposed by the United States as early as 1 April when the British put it forward in response to Dulles' call for "united action". The US Government had rejected the suggestion as it viewed such a solution to be only a temporary palliative and that it would lead to a communist domination of South-East Asia. Despite this the British had come to the Conference with a plan for partition. It was now put forward in the form of a military regrouping by the French. The United States conveyed its objections to the French accordingly. This was perhaps responsible for the French objection on 25 May along with the Vietnamese, to a proposal by the Viet Minh for a partition of the country into two large segments.[30] It is, however, doubtful whether the French really preferred a "patchwork" form of division to a "single-line" idea. It looked as though the French support for the Vietnamese position was only formal and was prompted by the American opposition.[31] The Americans, like the Vietnamese, seemed to have believed it possible to preserve the

territorial and political integrity of Vietnam. It was not until the meeting with the two British statesmen at Washington, that the United States was prepared to concede that there was no possibility of preventing this territorial arrangement. It was then that the United States accepted a plan for partition.

The United States had equally strong views on another proposal before the Conference, that of the composition and powers of the Commission to supervise the armistice settlement. This question had occupied the Geneva Conference for the first three weeks of June. On 30 May, the Russian proposal was put forward for a four member Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission consisting of India, Pakistan, Poland and Czechoslovakia, with the decisions to be arrived at collectively. It also proposed that these members be given the power of veto. This would be similar to the one in Korea. The United States objected to this on the ground that even in the case of Korea such a Commission consisting of two neutrals and two Communists had proved ineffective and not very impartial. Instead, the United States supported a Vietnamese proposal for supervision by the United Nations. This was however opposed by Communist China which warned that any attempt to bring in the United Nations would wreck the Conference.

On the other hand, Eden's proposal that the Commission should consist of the Colombo Powers[32] was accepted by France and the United States, but was opposed by Russia which believed that there should be at least one Communist member. The United States not only opposed the inclusion of any Communist member but also the veto proposal of the Soviet Union. It held the view that all decisions should be arrived at by a majority.[33] The deadlock between the two parties on this issue was responsible for Eden's warning that the discussions might be broken off unless an agreement was reached soon. Following this, on 16 June, Molotov showed himself willing for a more flexible arrangement. He not only accepted a three member commission with one Communist and two neutral nations, but also gave up his insistence on the veto.

It was at this time that Thailand, backed by the United States, requested the UN Security Council to send observers to South-East Asia on the ground that the situation in Vietnam threatened its own security and international peace. This move was interpreted as an American effort to bring the Vietnamese question before the United Nations by the back door, thereby fulfilling one of the conditions for

American intervention. The United States while working for a cease-fire in Geneva, was eager to turn the problem of a political settlement over to the United Nations. Thailand's proposal was, however, vetoed by the Soviet Union on 18 June when the prospects for a settlement in Geneva looked brighter.

With this, the US objections to this proposal died. It disapproved of the results and disassociated itself from the agreements. The *New York Herald Tribune* even called it an unprecedented French-British-Russian-Chinese agreement over the heads of the American delegation.[34]

More than all these, it was with the question of guaranteeing the Geneva settlement that the United States was most concerned. In fact, the prospects of its becoming a guarantor was responsible for the American objections to the agreements which did not agree with the imperatives of its policy in the Far East. On 23 June, on the eve of his departure for Washington, Eden set forth a plan for the international guarantee of the agreements. In it he proposed that "...we could have a reciprocal arrangement in which both sides take part, such as Locarno. We could also have a defensive alliance such as N.A.T.O. is in Europe."[35]

This mention of Locarno in passing, evoked widespread reaction in the United States. As *Times* put it, "Almost overnight Locarno has joined Munich and Yalta as an unmentionable word."[36] It was interpreted as a British move to introduce Communist China into the United Nations, just as the Locarno Pact of 1925 paved the way for the entry of Germany into the League of Nations. Eden's suggestions were denounced as a "sell-out of the Free World" and as a betrayal of the American cause. It was interpreted in the United States as an indication by the British Foreign Office of a separate and independent approach of being neutral in a Russo-American conflict. The United States resented that the Five Power guarantee proposed by Eden was sought to be incorporated into the Geneva settlement while the collective defence pact proposed by Dulles should have been postponed "as a future safeguard but ... not a present panacea."[37]

The reaction of the American Congress to the proposal was immediate. Representative John W. Mc Cormack (Democrat, Massachusetts) thought Eden's suggestions showed contempt of the American policies. He suspected that the British "had made a deal with France and Red China at Geneva...." "Do they expect us",

he retorted, "to enter into a Locarno agreement, so-called, which would mean at least a *de facto* recognition of Red China."[38] Congressmen John M. Vorys (Republican, Ohio) referring to the Mutual Security Program for Indo-China which amounted to $800 million asserted that "America was buying no part of a Locarno Treaty for South-East Asia" and that the Congress did not intend to underwrite any mutual guarantee treaties arrived at Geneva.[39] Twelve members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee stated in a letter to the President that the proposal of Eden would not only accept Communist conquests but guarantee them. They warned that unless it was made clear that the United States would not follow or support Eden's proposal, the whole mutual security concept and programme should be re-examined.[40] On 30 June, the House of Representatives accepted unanimously by voice vote an amendment by Representative Vorys, to the Mutual Security Act, expressing "the sense of Congress that no part of the funds appropriated under this section shall be used on behalf of governments which are committed by treaty to maintain Communist rule over any defined territory of Asia."[41]

Equally strong were the sentiments expressed in the Senate against the British proposals for guaranteeing the Geneva settlement. Senator William F. Knowland (Republican, California) who spearheaded the attack, believed that the Geneva Agreements would lead later in the year to a major effort to bring Communist China into the United Nations. "On the day when Communist China is voted in the United Nations", he pledged, "I shall resign my majority leadership in the Senate so that ... I can devote my full efforts ... to terminating U.S. membership in that organization and our financial support to it."[42] Senator Knowland's strong views were supported by many others including Senators Alexander Wiley (Republican, Wisconsin) Chairman of Committee on Foreign Relations, Styles Bridges (Republican, New Hampshire) Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, Ralph E. Flanders (Republican, Vermont), Pat Mc Carran (Democrat, Nevada) and Burnet R. Maybank (Democrat, South Carolina).[43] The Minority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson (Democrat, Texas) too supported Knowland's statement. He called Eden's proposal for five power guarantee a "bitter pill to swallow" and one which "smacked of appeasement at Munich". Such allied disunity would lead to the fall of South-East Asia, he warned.[44] Senator Mc Carran went further and assessed the results of the Geneva Conference as a serious blow to the US prestige, a loss of face by the Western

world throughout Asia, and a tremendous victory for the cause of Communism.[45]

There were, however, others who were not in favour of taking up such a strong position. Senators Wayne Morse (Independent, Oregon), Herbert H. Lehman (Democrat, New York), William Fulbright (Democrat, Arkansas), George A. Smathers (Democrat, Florida) and John J. Sparkman (Democrat, Alabama) were among those who favoured the United States continuing to work within the United Nations even if China were to be admitted.[46]

In the midst of this Congressional disapproval, the British statesmen could not have pursued the idea of a five power guarantee in Washington. In return for American concessions on other proposals like the partition and postponement of the formation of the collective defence pact, the British agreed to the American refusal to sign any agreement that would imply its consent to the surrender of north Vietnam or a guarantee of its integrity. This saved the American Administration from the charges of signing an agreement that was also signed by China. Eden, however, believed that he had succeeded in making the United States understand what he meant by Locarno and that the Administration even "seemed to like the idea".[47] This did not seem to be a correct reading of the Administration's mind. Secretary Dulles confirmed this when on 2 July he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he had no objection to the Vorys Amendment to the Mutual Defense Act of 1954.[48] This practically killed the Locarno proposal, as both Britain and France could not possibly have renounced the American aid on which their budgets were balanced.

Facing the Fait Accompli

Even as the United States was engaged in spelling out its minimum demands, the outlook in Geneva for an agreement had brightened following a meeting between the Chinese Premier Chou En-lai and the new French Premier Mendes-France on 23 June. The meeting increased the hopes for an agreement as it showed the Chinese Premier conciliatory to various French demands. He agreed to the independence of Laos and Cambodia, to the partition of Vietnam though only as a temporary measure and even conceded the French demand that elections for the unification of Vietnam would not be held in the near future. By the end of June there was a prospect of agreement on the various issues.

This development faced the United States with a dilemma as to whether it should continue to associate itself with the Conference. It had come to recognize that an agreement was inevitable and that it would be welcomed by all the other parties. Not to agree to its conclusion would not be desirable from the point of allied unity on which its South-East Asia defence pact was to be based. It would also make the prospects of EDC still dimmer. The American authorities were also well aware of the widespread eagerness, and the support that such an agreement would receive both in Europe and Asia. Any attempt to prevent it would make the United States isolated and unpopular. The United States was also morally committed to both its allies to support any arrangement so long as it fulfilled the minimum terms contained in the Anglo-American communication to France.

On the other hand, the United States was reluctant, especially in an election year, to accept any responsibility for aiding, sponsoring or publicly defending a settlement which might be denounced within the nation as an appeasement of Communism. On 2 July Senator Knowland had announced his intention to sponsor a resolution in the Senate embodying his views on US withdrawal from the United Nations and to make this question an issue in the coming Congressional elections. The United States was also suspicious of Mendes-France's policy of a negotiated peace before the stipulated period. His direct negotiations with the Viet Minh, his conversations with the Chinese Premier and his firm refusal to any American intervention as a last ditch stand, had given rise to a belief that Mendes-France might concede anything to the Communist in return for an early cease-fire. Thomas J. Hamilton of the *New York Times* mentioned that Dulles was even convinced that it would be impossible for Mendes-France to obtain acceptance of the seven points in their entirety in his negotiations at Geneva.[49] The United States was also not very happy about his attitude to EDC and the lukewarm reference to it in the course of his investiture speech. This dissatisfaction with the French had already led to the United States breaking off its major participation in the Conference and recalling its chief delegate.

Victor Bator gives another factor for American dilemma. He wrote, whether the Conference was going to be a failure or success, the American Administration would be blamed in either case. If it were to fail, the blame would be laid on the United States as having obstructed the Conference. If it were to succeed, it would mean a

defeat not only for Dulles' pre-Geneva plans for intervention but also would disprove his thesis that no agreement was ever possible with Communists. It would also mean a certain, even though limited, recognition of Communist China as a factor in world affairs.[50]

With the reconvening of the Conference on 12 July, all the chief delegates, except those of the United States, returned to Geneva. The United States decided to remain aloof from the final stage of the negotiations. On 30 June, the President declared, "I will not be a party to any treaty that makes anybody a slave."[51] On 8 July Dulles told a news conference, that he had taken no decision on his own or Bedell Smith's return to Geneva.[52] This underlined the impression that the United States had decided to wash its hands off the Conference and disassociate itself from the final agreements.

The studied non-participation of the United States was resented both in London and Paris. The American announcement came at a time when the French Premier was making a last minute effort to extricate the maximum out of the Conference. On 7 July he had declared to the National Assembly that if there were no satisfactory outcome at Geneva, he would, as his government's last act before resignation, submit to the Assembly a Bill authorizing the dispatch of national conscripts to Indo-China. The public abstention of the United States, by displaying the Western disunity, would nullify any disadvantage the French could gain by the above declaration and would further reduce the latter's bargaining position at this vital stage of the negotiations. Hence strong pressure was exercised by Eden and Mendes-France on Dulles to return to Geneva and participate actively in the negotiations. At long last the Secretary of State consented, not to go to Geneva, but to meet Eden and Mendes-France in Paris.

The Paris meeting (13-14 July) resulted in an announcement that the United States would resume participation at Geneva with Bedell Smith as the head of the delegation. This decision was welcomed in Paris as it would help in arriving at a cease-fire agreement. The American acquiescence in the agreement would also discourage the Vietnamese nationalists from resisting the agreement.

Eisenhower has traced the reasons for what looked like a reversal in American stand, to Mendes-France's report that the discussions with the Viet Minh on various points had been proceeding favourably for the West. Dulles also secured an agreement

from Mendes-France to a position similar to the Anglo-American memorandum of 29 June and was assured of the firmness of the British and French attitudes towards the various terms. It was this assurance and the French argument that without the United States' backing it would be difficult to achieve these seven points that finally made the latter change its opinion.[53] However, more than this agreement, the American decision seemed to have been based on the practical consideration that a complete break from the Conference might wreck the EDC and split the Western coalition. Hence the United States sought to find a formula which could meet the views of its allies as also those of the opposition at home and the convictions of the American officials.

The newspaper reports spoke of such a formula as having been arrived at Paris. The United States while participating in the Conference, would not be a party to the settlement nor guarantee it. It would, however, guarantee the non-communist territory against a communist attack, along with the other powers under the proposed South-East Asia pact. If the communists insisted on the neutralisation of the Indo-Chinese States, these states might not be parties to the pact, but the pact could still guarantee their territorial integrity. Such was the formula arrived at Paris and this helped the United States out of the dilemma of association with Geneva.

By the time the Conference was resumed on 12 July there was exactly a week left for the expiration of Mendes-France's self-imposed deadline. The few points that had yet to be decided were the location of the line dividing Vietnam, the date of elections to unify the country and the composition of the Supervisory Commission. The French held the position that a line should be drawn near the 18th Parallel with a French enclave in the north and that no specific date for elections should be fixed. On these points, the American delegation backed the French, though it scrupulously avoided giving any impression of being an active negotiator. On 18 July in a restricted session Bedell Smith even declared that the United States was not a belligerent and that it had not sought and would not seek to impose its views in any way on the belligerents who were the parties primarily interested. If the negotiations reached an agreement of a character that the United States was able to respect, Smith told the Conference, Washington was prepared to declare unilaterally in accordance with its obligations under the UN Charter, that it would refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb the agreement. It

would, however, view with "grave concern" any revival of aggression in violation of this.[54] This invited a demand from the Chinese delegation for an American guarantee for the settlement. It declared that it would refuse to sign the settlement unless there were the signatures of all the nine-powers. The Chinese did not, however, press it on being told that an American signature has been refused.

On 21 July, the Indo-Chinese armistice was finally signed and a final Conference declaration issued. Some of the salient features of the settlement which concerned Vietnam were :

1. The demarcation line in Vietnam should run along at approximately the 17th Parallel. This left in the French hands the city of Hue, the port and air base of France as also the only road that connected Hue with the French base at Laos and which was a major supply route for Laos. This line divided the population more or less equally between the two segments.

2. Elections were to be held throughout Vietnam in July 1956 and the talks for organizing the same should be started by 20 July 1955.

3. The Viet Minh and the French were given ten months to withdraw their forces from their enclaves in each other's jurisdiction.

4. An international armistice commission consisting of India (Chairman), Canada and Poland would be responsible to see that there was no build-up of military supplies by either side during the armistice. All the decisions of the Commission should be arrived at by majority vote, though the most important decisions required unanimity.

5. There was no formal guarantee of the agreements, though the Conference Powers except the United States and Vietnam, issued a Final Declaration taking note of the agreements. In this it was agreed that in case of any violation of the agree ment, it would be decided by the International Control Commission. In case this Commission could not reach unanimity, the issue could be referred to the Conference Powers who agreed to consult one another.[55]

6. The purpose of the agreement was to achieve purely a military settlement. The demarcation line was a military one and "would not be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary". The Agreement only sought to create the necessary basis for the achievement of a political settlement.[56] The Agreement itself

was signed by the military authorities of the two sides of France and Viet Minh and was called the "Agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam", though it was negotiated at the highest political and diplomatic level. Nor was the Final Declaration signed by the various participating countries.

While all the other members approved the Declaration, by recording their oral assent, the United States along with Vietnam expressed its reservations on the accords. In a separate declaration made on the same day unilaterally, Bedell Smith stated that the United States took note of the agreements concluded and would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them". He, however, added that "it would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreement with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." Smith also supported the Vietnamese statement reserving the "right of the Vietnamese people to territorial unity, national independence and freedom"[57] and added, "the United States reiterates its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future and that it will not join an arrangement which would hinder this. Nothing in its declaration just made is intended to or does indicate any departure from its traditional position."[58]

On the same day in Washington President Eisenhower disassociated himself from the Geneva decisions. He declared that the agreement contained features which the United States did not like and that it was not a party to or bound by the decisions taken by the Conference. However, the United States hoped, he added, that it would lead to the establishment of peace and was willing to wait and see how the agreements worked in practice. He also declared that the United States would pursue the organization of collective defence in South-East Asia and announced its intention to establish direct diplomatic relations with Laos and Cambodia with separate Ambassador or Minister to be resident at their respective capitals.[59]

The Geneva settlement received varied types of reactions all over the world. There was generally a relief that the long drawn out war had at last come to a close. It brought the first moment of peace, even if only nominal and temporary, since the early 1930s. Even the American Administration seemed to derive some comfort from the settlement. This was reflected in the spirit in which the American declaration on 21 July was couched. President Eisenhower,

while not giving his whole-hearted approval to the Agreements, did not disapprove or criticize it either ; he was even willing to see how they worked in practice. In retrospect, he was convinced that "by and large, the settlement obtained by the French Union at Geneva in 1954 was the best it could get under the circumstances." "It ended", he added, "a bloody war and a serious drain on France's sources. More important, it saw the beginning of development of better understanding between the western powers and the nations of South-East Asia. It paved the way for a system of true co-operation between both in the never-ending struggle to stem the tide of communist expansionism."[60]

Under Secretary Smith, in defending his role at Geneva, echoed the same view. "It will be well to remember", he said, "that diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield."[61] This view has been confirmed by Donovan too. He believed the United States gave its "tacit support to the French in their settlement". By the statement that it would not stand by if the Reds violated the cease-fire, Donovan goes on, "Washington was helping itself materially ... to get the best of a bad bargain and thus played an important part in keeping the domino from going all the way over with a crash."[62]

On the other hand Sherman Adams who was then Assistant to the President, and who was the source of information to Donovan, reported that the truce caused no satisfaction in Washington. According to him, Eisenhower as well as many others in Government "felt that the communist aggression in Indo-China had paid off in victory, even though a partial one". As a result of this truce, Sherman Adams added, "the weakness of the South-East Asia states was pathetically evident."[63] Eisenhower himself expressed this dissatisfaction when he wrote : "...there was an element of tragedy in an agreement that put great numbers of people under Communist domination."[64]

The immediate Congressional reaction to the agreements was equally mixed. The general outlines of the agreement had been known in advance, and many Senators like Pat Mc Carran and Mike Mansfield had already called it a victory of communism and a blow for American prestige.[65] Senator Knowland called it "one of the greatest victories for the communists in a decade."[66] Senator William E. Jenner (Republican, Indiana) asserted that the United States had, in fact, guaranteed communist gains. "The United States has

been outthought, outtraded, and outgenerated..." he said. "It does no good to say we did not physically sign the Geneva agreement", he added. "That is the old excuse of Pontius Pilate who washed his hands to keep his conscience clear."[67] On the other hand, many other Republican and Democrat Congressmen agreed with the view that it was the best of a bad bargain. Senator Mansfield himself thought the Viet Minh had strength and power enough to have demanded a dividing line farther down the peninsula, and failing agreement could have won it, by force of arms.[68] He asked the fellow democrats not to make political capital out of a national misfortune.[69] Even Adlai E. Stevenson while criticising the Administration's indecisive policy as leading to "the sorry sequel" in the Geneva Agreement, placed the principal blame for the "disaster" not on the Republican Administration but on the French colonial policy.[70]

The American Press generally described the agreement as a setback or disaster for the Western powers and another major communist victory in the battle for the world.[71] Hanson Baldwin called it a "peace of defeat".[72] The *New Republic* believed the Geneva Conference to be "a great diplomatic defeat for the non-Communist world". It was of the view that it would not be very long before the Viet Minh would unify the entire country under their control. The least they could hope would be a coalition government heavily dominated by Communists. However, the journal opposed the American decision not to sign the truce. At a time when the communists were coming closer to the non-communist Asians, it viewed, the United States was moving steadily away from them.[73] The *Nation* too believed that the agreement was a tragedy for the Americans. "...the United States suffered the greatest loss of all". "It was not a loss in terms of legal rights or Indo-Chinese territory", it added further, "...but in the measure of its position in the North Atlantic Alliance, its prestige in Asia, and its contact with the aspirations of the Asian peoples." "America's loss may also prove the greatest over the long period", it forecast, "and it is not to be repaired with dollars and guns." It did not, however, believe it was a "Munich".[74] On the other hand, the *New York Times* itself agreed with the Administration's viewpoint that it was the best the United States could have hoped for.[75]

Among the writers on Vietnam Frank N. Trager agrees with this view. He believes that the Geneva Agreements "were written in haste and ended in compromise with, and excessive concessions to

the Communist powers". These agreements which "added up to political folly ... helped Communist North Vietnam to initiate further struggle against South Vietnam and prevented any objective peace-keeping machinery from performing its assigned function". In his view, the American disassociation from the Final Declaration did not really mean much of a success as it did not wholly relieve it from observing the provisions of the Agreements and Declarations as long as all others who were parties to them abided by them. Trager finds fault not so much with the US lack of foresight or blind reliance as much as with the political pressure brought upon by Mendes-France for a settlement of any kind, so long as it was a quick one.[76]

On the other hand, Bernard Fall found the final terms obtained by Mendes-France well within the minimum limits set out earlier by Dulles. In his view they were definitely a diplomatic success under the circumstances.[77] He, as well as Robert Shaplen, believed that in the long run, the American refusal to sign at Geneva had beneficial consequences for the new Administration that was building south of the 17th Parallel.[78]

Another author who agreed with this point of view was Douglas Pike. He believed that the "United States escaped the dilemma of trying to stop communism with serving colonialism..." In his view, the United States "saw the salvage of half of Vietnam from communist control when at the outset of the Conference it had no reason to believe that anything could be saved".[79]

An evaluation of the Geneva Agreements from the point of view of the United States should be made in the context of the basic objectives with which the United States entered Geneva. The American expectations from the Conference and its possible outcome were limited, practical and immediate. President Eisenhower pointed out that it aimed at a *modus vivendi*—a settlement which, while enabling the United States not to intervene actively, would not lead to the loss of American interests either. Looked at from this point of view, the Conference was a success for the American policy. While the partition was against the American desire and a concession to the communists, it was the best outcome the West could have hoped for.

The same could be said about the decision on the date of elections in Vietnam for chalking out its political future. The communists had conceded to hold the elections after a period of two years

while originally they had demanded it within six months. It was widely believed and even the United States was quite convinced, that had the elections been held at this time, it would have ended in a peaceful take-over of all Vietnam by the communists. President Eisenhower himself conceded "that had elections been held at the time of the fighting, possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai."[80] Not only was the initial postponement for two years a benefit to the Vietnamese Government, but the subsequent continuous procrastination of the same in the future was made possible by the disassociation of the Vietnamese Government from the Geneva Agreements. Hence the Geneva Agreements could be called a limited success of the American policy which was politically indecisive, militarily non-interventionist and at the Conference table indifferent.

This limited success cannot however be attributed to any deterrent effect of the American proposals for joint action with the British and the French, as Sherman Adams and Donovan seemed to have believed.[81] Dulles had also told James Shepley on 11 January 1956, that it was the American "brinkmanship" and bellicosity that deterred further "red aggression" and helped Britain and France reach a good settlement.[82] The factors which enabled such a settlement should be traced elsewhere. Some American diplomats themselves recognized, "the Reds stopped where they stopped because they felt it to be in their own best interests at that particular time to do so, hoping to take over the rest of the country by political means later on."[83]

On the positive side, the credit for the Agreement should be lent to the Russian reasonableness and Chinese co-operation. It was agreed in the Western circles that the Viet Minh were dissatisfied with the partition and the postponement of the elections and would not have conceded them, but for the pressure from the Soviet Union and China. The Viet Minh could have sought better terms both in the battlefield as well as on the conference table. However it was Ho Chi Minh's "deep loyalty and fidelity to international Communism" (as Douglas Pike puts it) which made him accept the partition. Possibly Ho Chi Minh was persuaded by a French promise to the Russians that elections to unify the nation would be held within a year's time, if the Viet Minh would agree to a partition now. According to Pike, "the Viet Minh and the Communists were denied the fruits

of victory that they felt were honestly and morally theirs."[84] Isaac Deutscher too pointed out what the Viet Minh secured was "only part of the ripe fruit of their recent political and military victories." In his view these major concessions were made by the Communists in Geneva with a view to "global bargaining", to bargain "space against time and positions in Asia against positions in Europe."[85]

This raises the question as to why the Viet Minh agreed to a partition. Were the Viet Minh and President Ho Chi Minh credulous enough to hope that the promised election would be held as stipulated in the Geneva Accords? According to George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis, the Viet Minh expected that the ICC would be backed by France in arranging for the pre-election consultations and in supervising the actual balloting in mid-1956. The Viet Minh had also believed that so central a feature of the Accords as elections would be honoured and that the Soviet Union and China which persuaded the Viet Minh to moderate its demands would stand by this commitment.[86]

On the other hand it has been argued that to expect the Viet Minh to yield to the 'pressure' or "persuasion" of the Chinese and Russian Communists gives a false impression of Ho's true position. The Viet Minh were keen to avoid further loss in men and material, even though ultimate victory seemed assured. The war weariness in Vietnam and the need not to alienate the Viet Minh sympathisers in the French held territories made the Viet Minh agree to a temporary partition. The Geneva Decisions had transferred the struggle from the military to the political plane where the Viet Minh were equally effective and hopeful of achieving its aim of reunification of the state.

This explains why the firm pledge of nationwide elections under the supervision of ICC, within the agreed time limit, became a cardinal point in Viet Minh's policy in the period following the Geneva Conference. The statements of Ho Chi Minh and other leaders, welcomed the Geneva Accords and expressed relief that it established peace. But at the same time they made it sufficiently clear that this partition was temporary and was meant only for purposes of cease-fire and troop regroupment and their aim was unity through general elections. They frequently enjoined the French Government to correctly implement the agreements they have signed and warned against increasing intervention of the United States in order to "sabotage the Armistice Agreements".[87]

The Chinese on their part aimed at an overall military and political objective of preserving Asia as their own traditional sphere of influence. The Chinese were eager to emerge as one of the important powers in the world and to enhance their prestige in the Asian eyes. In this context, the Conference was a success for China as it gained diplomatic recognition as one of the Big Five Powers of the world and the foremost among the Asian countries without whose co-operation no Asian issue could be solved. It helped China to start a peace offensive and gain more friends in Asia by appearing as Asia's flexible arbiter in the face of what appeared to many Asians as Dullesian rigidity. This was confirmed by the signing of the Sino-Indian declaration of Pancha Sheela on 28 June.

The Chinese were equally keen to prevent a direct American intervention. They believed that if a settlement could be arrived at within the time limit set by the French Premier this would upset the calculations of the United States, for the Chinese believed that the latter was creating "a tense situation ... in preparation for extending the Indo-China war".[88] Once the United States intervened directly in Indo-China, Peking would be faced with the difficult decision of how to respond to this new American presence in South-East Asia.

The settlement owed its formulation equally to the moderating influence of Russia. More than the fears of a Sino-American collision in Vietnam, the important factor in Russia's conciliatory attitude seemed to be European considerations. The Russians adopted, what Morgenthau has called "a policy of transforming the cold war of position into a cold war of manoeuvre which was to be decided not in South-East Asia but Europe."[89] By making concessions to France and not humiliating it to the limits of its ability, the Communists hoped to earn French goodwill. The Soviet Union could then succeed in preventing France from ratifying the EDC. A withdrawal from Indo-China would also mean less of French dependence on the American aid. The replacement of Laniel by Mendes-France, a firm opponent of EDC and one committed to a honourable truce, helped Moscow in this aim. Whatever might have been the reason, it was beyond doubt that the communist powers attached considerable importance to the Geneva Conference and were keen to arrive at positive results.

Above all, an early settlement could be possible because of the French keenness to get out of Indo-China within the self-specified

time limit. The Geneva Agreements of July 1954 could be called the result of the inter-play of all these various foctors.

On the other hand, it has been sometimes argued that but for the American display of aloofness and abstention the Conference might have reached results a little more favourable to France. Ellen J. Hammer, for instance, believes that the United States' attitude withheld from Mendes France whatever little bargaining strength France was left with and made it impossible for him to salvage even Southern Vietnam in tact.[90] It is, however, doubtful whether an active and consistent participation by the United States in the proceedings would have really helped in arriving at a settlement at all. The Dullesian poorish diplomacy, the rightist pressure at home and the need to display power would have made the American stand more rigid. This, in turn, might have made the Communist Powers inflexible and hereby prolonged the Conference. An early agreement, however imperfect it might have been, was possible only due to the indifference of United States and absence of a personality like John Foster Dulles. In fact, the hesitation and aloofness of the United States made it all the more imperative for the Communist Powers participating in the Conference to arrive at some concrete results.

Hence the Geneva Agreements and the role the United States played in arriving at them, put the American diplomacy in an unfavourable light. The dilemma it faced, the indecisive unhelpful and negative role it played and the pressures it built on the French behind the scenes, were factors that made the United States' diplomacy look like a failure, even while the Geneva Accords were a limited success. It also led the American Administration and the people to believe that the Geneva Accords were not binding either on them or on the South Vietnamese. The truth is that the Final Declaration to which no participating nation gave its signature but to which all of them consented, was only as binding on them as the separate declarations made by the United States and South Vietnam "taking note of the agreements concluded." The legal quibblings which took place subsequently in order to exempt the United States from the operation of the Geneva Agreements, were neither envisaged in 1955 by the United States nor interpreted as such by the other Powers.

FOOTNOTES

1. U.S., *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.), 24 May 1954, p. 781. Referred hereafter as *Bulletin*.
2. Secretary Dulles in a broadcast to the Nation on 7 May. Ibid., 17 May 1954, p. 744.
3. Ibid., 24 May 1954, p. 781.
4. Secretary Dulles in a news conference on 8 June. Ibid., 21 June 1954, p. 947.
5. Ibid., 24 May 1954, p. 782.
6. *New York Times*, 13 May 1954. This latter portion which was a part of his original statement was deleted later in the press conference transcript distributed by the Department of State and printed in the *Bulletin*.
7. Ibid., 12 May 1954.
8. Ibid., 13 May 1954.
9. As reported by Senator Alexander Wiley, the Chairman of the Committee. Ibid.
10. *Bulletin*, 7 June 1954, pp. 863-4.
11. Dulles in a statement. Ibid., 28 June 1954, p. 972.
12. Sir Anthony Eden, *Memoirs*: *Full Circle* (London, 1960), p. 110.
13. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change 1953-1956* (London, 1963), p. 359. For the other conditions, see *Bulletin*, n. 11. It is surprising how the United States could have ever expected the last condition to be fulfilled even if all others were accepted.
14. Ibid., pp. 360-2.
15. *New York Times*, 3 June 1954.
16. *Washington Post*, 8 June 1954.
17. Eisenhower, n. 13, p. 360.
18. Ibid., p. 365.
19. Eden, n. 12, p. 119.
20. *New York Times*, 20 May 1954.
21. Eisenhower, n. 13.
22. *Bulletin*, 28 June 1954, p. 991.
23. Eisenhower, n. 13, p. 365.
24. *Bulletin*, 28 June 1954, p. 990.
25. Eisenhower, n. 13.
26. *Bulletin*, 12 July 1954, p. 49.
27. Eisenhower, n. 13, p. 368 and Eden, n. 12, pp. 132-3.
28. For the text of the various proposals, see Denise Folliot, ed., *Documents on International Affairs 1954* (London, 1957), pp. 125-35.
29. Eisenhower, n. 13, pp. 357-8.
30. *New York Times* 26 May 1954. The Vietnamese had believed that the regrouping should consist of a number of "pockets" leading finally to a patchwork of stabilised Viet Minh and French Union areas. This would naturally have less of an air of lasting partition. However such a partition would be much more difficult to supervise than the single-line arrangement which would lead to just two big segments.
31. Such a line of argument is given by Coral Bell, *Survey of International Affairs 1954* (London, 1957), pp. 48-49.

32. The term Colombo Powers referred to the five Asian nations of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia, whose Prime Ministers met in Colombo on 28 April to consider the international situation. The Geneva Conference and relations with Communist China were two important problems that were discussed in this conference. The views of this group carried considerable weight with the British Foreign Secretary and influenced appreciably the Soviet and Chinese stands.
33. Bedell Smith in a statement on 9 June. *Bulletin*, 21 June 1954, pp. 943-4.
34. *New York Herald Tribune*, 21 June 1954.
35. Folliot, n. 3, p. 157.
36. *Times* (London), 26 June 1954.
37. Folliot, n. 3, p. 151.
38. U.S., *Congressional Record* (Washington, D.C.), vol. 100, 29 June 1954, p. 8702.
39. Ibid., p. 8699.
40. *New York Times*, 27 June 1954.
41. U.S., *Congressional Record*, 30 June 1954, p. 8892.
42. Ibid., 1 July 1954, p. 9018.
43. Ibid.
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46. Ibid., 2 July 1954, pp. 9111 and 9913 and 8 July 1954.
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48. *New York Times*, 3 July 1954.
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50. Victor Bator, *Vietnam, A Diplomatic Tragedy* (New York, 1965), pp. 120-1.
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54. *New York Times*, 19 July 1954.
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60. Eisenhower, n. 13, pp. 374-5.
61. *New York Times*, 24 July 1954.
62. Robert Donovan, *Eisenhower, The Inside Story* (New York, 1956), p. 267.
63. Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report* (New York, 1961), p. 125.
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71. Ibid., 21 July 1954; *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 July 1954,
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77. Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Vietnams, A Political and Military Analysis* (London, 1963), p. 231.
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79. Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1966) p. 52.
80. Eisenhower, n. 13, p. 372.
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83. Donovan, n. 62, p. 267.
84. Pike, n. 79.
85. Isaac Deutscher, "Concessions at Geneva", *The Hindu*, 20 August 1954. p. 5.
86. George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York, 1967).
87. Ho Chi Minh, *Statements after the General Conference* (Hanoi, 1955), p. 25.
88. *People's Daily* (Peking), 3 April 1954, p. 3. This view has also been presented by Hans J. Morgenthau, "Vietnam Another Korea ?", *Commentary* (New York), May 1962, p. 370; as also Tiber Mende, *China And Her Shadow* (London, 1961), p. 297.
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VIII

Conclusion

The period 1945 to 1954 has been a decade of vital importance to the Vietnamese ; it began for them with the dawning of hopes for freedom and liberation from colonial rule. But soon it was drowned in incessant bloody warfare and unlimited sacrifices, with their own terrible economic, social and psychological consequences. The end of the decade brought a temporary respite to the war, but only after dividing the thirty million Vietnamese into two separate nations—an artificial political and military division that had no bearing on the historical, economic and social factors of Vietnam.

The first Vietnam War had all the makings of a Greek tragedy. The general Vietnamese population was the greatest loser in the war but the French, the Americans, the "nationalists" Vietnamese and the Viet Minh did not fare better.

The first Vietnam War was essentially a struggle for freedom from alien domination. It truly represented the legitimate aspirations of a people that was keen to develop its own resources. The Western countries like France and the United States, however, instead of recognising it for what it was, pictured the war

as simply a part of the world-wide Communist effort to gain more and more areas under their control. To them the Communist leanings of the leaders of this movement looked more important than the predominantly nationalistic platforms of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN). However, to the Vietnamese themselves, this consideration was quite irrelevant. In their view there was only one enemy and that was the colonial ruler. Anyone or a group that resisted the French rule and strove to bring it to an end, was accepted as the national leader and readily obeyed. This explained the popularity and willing co-operation that the Viet Minh received among the villagers in their guerilla warfare. This explained how and why Bao Dai and his supporters, however nationalistic they might have been and whatever might have been their efforts to extract more concessions from the French, were looked upon as French collaborators and their puppets. Even a staunch nationalist like Ngo Dinh Diem, who had preferred to spend the major part of this period in self-imposed exile to collaborating with the French, could not ever capture the imagination of the Vietnamese as Ho had. Ho had come to be viewed as an ardent and active nationalist leader who guided the nation's course during the most painful years of its history. The trickling in of concessions from the French only helped to sharpen the nationalist fervour and heighten the stature of Ho among the people.

The American involvement in this war was truly parabolical. From the small beginnings it had in 1950, the involvement had become more and more deep and an end to it is, as yet, out of sight. Before 1950, the United States, though aware of the freedom struggle in Vietnam, scrupulously avoided getting itself involved in it. Much against the hopes of the Asian and particularly the Vietnamese, it had merely confined itself to the general platitudes, of being a sympathiser and supporter of freedom and self-determination without at the same time, doing anything substantial in this regard. It viewed Vietnam as an area of no vital American interests. The two important events which impelled the United States to pay greater attention to the Vietnamese question were the success of the Communists in China and the outbreak of the Korean war. As it came to be interested in the Vietnamese affairs, the outlook which the American authorities adopted was not one of the oft-proclaimed Jeffersonian equality and Wilsonian by self-determination, but a vision that was considerably blurred by the exigencies of the cold war.

Hence the United States came to accept the French view that the latter's presence in Vietnam was necessary at least till such time as Vietnam was "saved" from a Communist take-over. It accepted the French version of the war as a part of the free world's fight against International Communism rather than an attempt to reinstate itself by force. The American Administration was persuaded by the necessities of its containment policy, to recognize Bao Dai as the legitimate ruler of Vietnam and the true representative of the nationalist aspirations of the non-Communist Vietnamese. Thereby the United States became a willing partner in and financier of the "Bao Dai Experiment". Inevitably the American sponsorship of the regime meant a progressive military involvement in the war against the Viet Minh. Between May 1950 when it initiated a programme of economic and military assistance to Vietnam, to July 1954 when the latter was partitioned, the United States had extended aid to the tune of $ 1535.2 million. By the time the war was over in July 1954, the United States was financing practically almost the entire cost of the war.

With the recognition of the French claims, the United States lost every opportunity to come to terms with the nationalists. The years immediately after the Second World War offered a propitious chance when the United States could have guided and helped the nationalists by bringing pressure on the French to conduct meaningful negotiations. This would have helped in reaching some sort of an independent solution and averted ten years of bloodshed and frustration. This was a period when the United States enjoyed vast prestige in Asia and in particular with the Viet Minh. The United States, even during the period 1948-52, could have adopted a firm position on the issue of independence and applied pressure on the French to yield substantially. It could have threatened the French with the withdrawal of its financial support, without which the French could not have continued the fighting in Vietnam.

Instead, the United States came to view the Viet Minh and its activities through the coloured vision of an ideological war. It was, however, a considered opinion of many Indo-Chinese as well as others that Ho Chi Minh was primarily a nationalist who was motivated, more than anything else, by the independence of his motherland. Moscow was too far off ; nor was his standing with Stalin so high, as to make him rely on unflinching help from Russia.

A Bolshevik though he was, Ho Chi Minh was more than just a follower of Kremlin dictates. He had all the makings of a Tito even before Titoism made its appearance. Even a left-wing government led by Ho Chi Minh might have adopted an independent, nationalist approach to the Vietnamese affairs. In view of the later relationship of Ho Chi Minh with the Communists, especially after the Sino-Soviet split, the view that Ho might have led the Vietnamese on a moderate, neutralist path, does not seem to be too far-fetched. The United States, however, could not believe that a localised, independent communist action, keeping up with the nationalist sentiments was possible. It viewed Ho merely as a stooge of Kremlin and Peking and the nationalist movement as another version of communist expansion in Asia. However the French rebuttal of the Viet Minh offers and the American keenness not to entangle itself in Vietnamese affairs, made the Viet Minh seek the friendship and support of the communist powers. As Robert Shaplen puts it, for the United States, Ho represented an "untried gamble", and the period 1945-50 marked a turning point "when the 'lost revolution' was really lost."[1]

This, however, did not mean that the United States was unaware of the Vietnamese dissatisfaction with the French or of the unpopularity of the Bao Dai regime. The United States had time and again expressed its differences with the French on this score and its dissatisfaction with the progress towards independence as well as the building up of a native army. However, its view in this regard, came to be involved in a vicious circle. Its arguments remain that once the French granted independence, the Bao Dai regime would become more popular, the war would evoke more support and loyalty from the population, and thereby would lead to a communist defeat. On the other hand, the French argued, once the war against communism was won the need for French presence would come to an end and the Vietnamese could assume control of all their affairs, including the military and financial ones.

To this mutually conflicting views of the situation, was added the complications of the Western European situation which necessitated a close and amicable Franco-American relations. The United States had come to rely on the formation of the European Defence Community as the shield against a Russian expansion towards Western Europe and chose to put all its stakes on it, until it was finally rejected by the French Assembly in August 1954. The need for the French parliamentary ratification to the same, compelled the

United States to soft-pedal the issue of independence of Vietnam. The distrust of the Gaullists towards the United States and the opposition of the French Communist Party which was the second strongest Communist movement outside the Soviet Union made it more difficult for the United States. Thus its policy towards the Vietnamese issue hinged on metropolitan Europe.

While finding itself unable to urge the French in much stronger terms to fulfill the Vietnamese aspirations, the United States also came to rely on certain assumptions which proved to be untrue ultimately by the fall of Dien Bien Phu. It believed till as late as March 1954 that the French military position, reinforced by increased American aid, was growing stronger. Fed on illusions and half-truths by the French Government which was keen to get increased American aid, the United States was convinced that but for the contingency of a direct Chinese participation, the war could be won by the French. This explained the various statements by high officials in the United States, warning the Chinese against intervention.

The United States believed that the French would continue the fighting and bring the war to a successful conclusion, and that once that was achieved France would grant complete independence to Bao Dai. These and certain other American assumptions were shown to be based on weak foundations. The United States had hoped that the Bao Dai government, if given military and political support, would stabilize itself and would be in a position to draw away increasing number of nationalists from the Communist fold of the Viet Minh. The United States hoped that an increasing measure of freedom to Bao Dai would help in strengthening his hands and would make his regime more popular. It also expected that the process of evolution towards complete independence would be continuous, though gradual.

However the fact was that Bao Dai was not acceptable to the Vietnamese population. Men of stature among non-Communists were not willing to join Bao Dai's government. Ngo Dinh Diem, the future Prime Minister did not look to Bao Dai, as a nationalist leader. He said, "...I believe it is only just to reserve the best posts in Vietnam for those who have merited best of the country. I speak of the resistants."[2] The private life of Bao Dai and the fact that he spent most of his time in the French Riviera, when the nation was fighting against the French, did not help him in making him a popular figure on the local scene. The *New York Times* understood this, when it wrote that Bao Dai lacked the necessary follow-up action

after his shrewd bargaining with the French, and contributed little to a positive record.[3] Even the United States military and economic help to Bao Dai failed to raise his stature in the Vietnamese eyes.

Many Vietnamese felt that such an aid would be both wasteful and politically a mistake until the government was more independent. As the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, the United States would have both to create and support a truly national Vietnamese government.[4] The Vietnamese nationalists were not satisfied with the Bao Dai-Auriel Agreement and treated Bao Dai as only a French puppet.

The United States also assumed that the Communist recognition of Ho Chi Minh, and his seeking aid from China following the American aid to the Bao Dai regime, would alienate the non-Communist nationalists in the Viet Minh. But this too did not materialize. The American authorities, perhaps, assumed that the Viet Minh's dependence on the Chinese aid would aggravate the uneasiness of the nationalists in the Viet Minh and would result in the latter's breaking away from the Viet Minh. However, in practice, there was no desertion on any appreciable scale from the Viet Minh and not many crossed the border to the French. Even the Vietnam Catholic League would rather co-operate with the Viet Minh, who would win ultimately, than side with Bao Dai and be vanquished.[5] The Viet Minh solidarity was not due to the fact that the Viet Minh was well organized and disciplined, and took strict measures against the deserters but it was because Ho Chi Minh was keen not to alienate the nationalists who formed a vast majority of his followers. He would not ride roughshod on the traditional anti-Chinese feelings of the majority of his followers. He even declared that the Viet Minh would not take advantage of China's success. Nor did there seem to be much basis for the rumour that Ho Chi Minh had concluded a secret military agreement with Communist China.[6] *The Times* reported that "up till now it is practically certain that Chinese arms have been paid for, and Viet Minh independence of action thereby retained."[7] Hence, one is hard put to agree with Virginia Thompson who wrote : the Communist recognition of Ho resulted in weaning many nationalists away from their support of the Republic.[8]

The other erroneous assumption of the United States was that its extension of huge economic and military assistance to the Bao Dai regime would increase the latter's stature in the eyes of the people and rally the nationalist leaders to his fold. This assumption failed not only because Bao Dai proved to be a wrong horse to bet on, but

also that an American aid, without a corresponding freedom to utilise it, was practically of no avail to the Vietnamese, except a few racketeers who benefited out of it. As a result, even the American economic aid which reached the Vietnamese directly, failed to achieve its purpose of winning the goodwill of the people for the United States. The Americans came to share with the French, the suspicions of the Vietnamese people and this led to grievous political and military consequences to the American policy not only during the Bao Dai period but even later during the regime of his successor, Diem.

There is, however, evidence of the fact that at least a section of American Administration was aware of the possible failure of its policy. Robert Shaplen, for instance, refers to a difference of views within the American Legation in Saigon, between those of the Minister Donald Heath and the Consul General Edmund Gullion. The latter advocated a firm American commitment to support the Vietnamese independence and to persuade the French to grant greater degree of independence. Referring to this Gullion said later that the United States "did not consider the exchange of letters (i.e. Elysee Accords) carefully enough at the time" and had hoped to influence the developments in the future.[9] According to another report, the United States in the London Conference of Big Three in May 1950 admitted the failure of Bao Dai Experiment and tried to replace him with Diem as the Head of the State. The American Foreign Minister even sought to bring pressure on his French counterpart. It was, however, the French reluctance which prevented any change.[10] The United States, perhaps, thought that this would help in weaning away the million Catholics in Vietnam from the nationalist movement and support Diem — a proposal which the Viet Minh criticised as part of the "divide and rule" policy of the colonialists. The Korean war, however, shifted the emphasis from the independence of Vietnam to the need to hold it from the Communists. It would, perhaps, be too much for the United States to expect the French to grant complete independence to the Vietnamese. If they did, the French would not be fighting a war there.

In its anxiety to prevent Communism running over Indo-China, and its eagerness to start off anti-Communist pursuits, the United States either would not or could not re-examine its basic assumptions. The result was that many of them failed to live up to the test and fulfil the US hopes. The United States had also, in the process, given rise to growing suspicions about the West among many Asians.

It came to share in a large measure, the distrust, resentment and unpopularity of the French among large segments of the population not only within Vietnam, but also in many parts of South and South-East Asia.

So too the unrealistic view of the French military strength could be traced to the existence of an intelligence gap and an over optimism in certain sections of the Department of State. The French desk in the Department of State, as well as its representatives in Paris urged a policy of restraint and caution towards France. The State Department also came to be considerably influenced by the Francophilism of its Ambassador in Saigon, Donald Heath who believed that the United States "ought not to rock the boat". Doubts had also been raised on the competence of the American diplomatic and military personnel in Saigon, to make independent, on-the-spot evaluation. There were also evidences to show a lack of co-operation between the Embassy and the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), and within the Embassy itself between the Ambassador and the Minister Counsellor, Edmund Gullion.

These wrong assessments of the military as well as political situation were responsible for the widening gap between the French public opinion which clamoured for negotiations to bring the war to a close, and the American Government's insistence that the French should continue to fight till the war was won. The French officials found themselves caught between these two extremes. This, to a great extent, was responsible for the lack of direction in the French military efforts and the sapping of the French morale at the battle fronts.

The American assumptions failed mainly because the United States sought to apply a military solution to a political problem. At a time when the forces of nationalism were riding high in Asia in general and Vietnam in particular, the United States tried to slow it down and even defeat it because it was profoundly concerned with its own diplomatic objectives both in Europe and Asia. It ignored the fact that in a guerilla warfare, success lies on that side which holds the support of the masses.

The American policy, however, brought in the end, considerable setbacks even for those diplomatic objectives. This could be traced to the half-hearted, indecisive and haphazard approach of the politico-military circles in Washington, to the war in Vietnam especially during its critical stage in March-April 1954. It was a

confused mixture of unclear proposals and mutually contradictory policy directives. Public pronouncements on proposals like "united action", direct intervention and collective defence without prior discussions within the Administration and consultations with the Allies, not only led to their abortive ending but also were the cause of an unwholesome debate both within and outside the Administration. It also led to a series of accusations and counter-accusations among the three big Western Powers which were closely involved in this.

This debate which gave the appearance that an American involvement in a "tragic adventure" was imminent, cost the United States tremendously in terms of its diplomatic relations. The Dulles policy of "carrying a small stick and speaking loudly" left a lasting impact not only on US relations with Britain and France, but also on the uncommitted world of Asia. It strengthened the Communists' propaganda against the United States as an imperialist and war-monger, even while the American statements did not lead to or were not meant to lead to any direct intervention.

The present writer does not hold, for a minute, the view that even a massive American assistance would have held Dien Bien Phu. Nor can it be said with any degree of conviction that even a direct American intervention by its ground troops might have brought about a quick victory. (The present situation in Vietnam has denied such an American victory even after a prolonged warfare.) Nor does this writer believe that the political situation in 1954 justified any direct American intervention, as it had been threatening all along.

This fruitless controversy within the United States and preoccupation of the Administration in facing domestic and foreign criticism, also distracted it from the significance of the main events in and around the Geneva Conference. The proceedings of the Geneva Conference and the relatively flexible attitude of the two leading Communist Powers, the Soviet Union and Communist China, offered a good opportunity for the United States to get out of its past commitments and formulate a clear-cut policy for the future towards Vietnam.

It is beyond doubt that the very same terms of the Geneva Agreement, which the United States had grudgingly accepted as the best available under the prevailing circumstances, could have been made more concrete and inviolable, if the United States had not

refused to endorse them. Even a reluctant endorsement by the United States would have brought forth a guarantee from the other parties and thereby added to the sanctity and permanence of the Geneva decisions.

As it was, in its refusal to accept the Geneva decision to partition Vietnam, the United States found itself isolated from its European allies. Such refusal also made unavoidable a unilateral American commitment to preserve South Vietnam intact politically and militarily. By a strange coincidence of events, the United States found itself in later years committed, both politically and militarily, to presere the partition of Vietnam. It also came to oppose Vietnam's unification either by political or military means, as it would undoubtedly result in an overwhelming victory for the Communists. The Geneva Agreements, instead of enabling the United States to disentangle itself from Vietnam with as little loss as possible (as it had then believed) led it to a wider and ever deepening involvement to gunrantee the same.

The Geneva Conference and the agreements arrived, also offered an opportunity for the United States to break with the past and formulate an entirely new approach to the Vietnamese question. The Geneva Agreement which provided for consultation among the participating nations in order to ensure the cessation of hostilities kept the door open for further contacts between the West and the Communist countries. But by its non-acceptance of the agreement, the United States denied itself of this opportunity. France had modified its approach, by establishing some sort of semi-diplomatic contacts with North Vietnam and even signed a treaty with the latter for the protection of its economic interests in the North. On the other hand, the United States motivated by its inflexible anti-Communist fervour, took immediate steps to provide all out aid to and collaboration with the South Vietnamese Government. Hence it looks that the United States was only waiting for the withdrawal of the French from Vietnam in order to preserve and protect the Bao Dai government. With the withdrawal of the French, the taint of colonialism had been removed. The American military and economic aid could be justified as purely an anti-communist measure. Even the "unilateral direct intervention" from which the United States shied away in early 1954, could now be possible. The credit and benefits of protecting the South Vietnamese regime could now be derived solely by the United States and not shared by the French.

As the French started a process of gradual withdrawal from Vietnam, the United States moved forward to occupy a front seat in the latter's policy-making process. Very soon it completely replaced France and started having a directing influence in South Vietnam. The French who had their obligations to North Vietnam under the Geneva Agreement were at the end of their presence in Vietnam; the United States, properly speaking, at the threshold of it.

While it is doubtful whether an American recognition of North Vietnam at this stage would have yielded any tangible results towards terminating the Vietnamese crisis, it is undeniably true that the rigid opposition which the United States adopted towards North Vietnam and the Geneva Accords, did not prove conducive to this. After a brief interval of few years, the Vietnam question got revived into an issue of primary importance and became the cause of renewed tension in the world. Meanwhile, in the eyes of the US policy-makers, Viet nam issue had gone through one cycle with the second one about to begin.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution* (New York, 1966), p. 54
2. As quoted by Hammer, "The Bao Dai Experiment", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 23, March 1950, p. 58
3. *New York Times*, 11 June 1950.
4. *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 March 1950.
5. A good study of this theme has been made by J.R. Clementin, "The Nationalist Dilemma in Vietnam", *Pacific Affairs*, September 1950, pp. 294-310
6. Such rumours were circulated often in the French Press. For instance on 24 August 1950. *Agence France Press*, published the details of such a Sino-Vietnamese treaty and this was reproduced the next day by the Associated Press of America. The Vietnamese, however, denied the existence of any such treaty and exposed its shallowness. *Vietnam Information*, 30 August 1950, pp. 1-3.
7. As quoted in, "Conflict in Indo-China", ed., *The Hindu*, 11 May 1950.
8. Virginia Thompson, "The Vietnamese Community in France", *Pacific Affairs*, March 1952, p. 58.
9. Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution Vietnam 1945-1965* (London, 1966) pp. 66-67.
10. As reported by Telepress, the Czech News.

Postscript

Much water has flown in the Mekong River since this work was finished. The course of Vietnamese history, since Geneva, has gone through a zig-zag pattern. These eighteen years of Vietnamese life and politics may better be viewed as the study of the nature and pattern of American intervention in Vietnam.

The Geneva Conference was an important landmark in American policy towards Indo-China—but it was only a landmark, not a turning point. Even before the ink on the Geneva Accords was dry, the United States resumed its policy of 'commitment' towards Vietnam. In fact during the Conference, on 15 June 1954, Ngo Dinh Diem was appointed as the Prime Minister of the "State of Vietnam". The elevation of Diem, a trusted man of the United States, credited to be a nationalist and progressive, picked and groomed by influential Americans like Cardinal Spellman, Senator Mike Mansfield and William Donovan, former O.S.S. Chief, was a pre-taste of the increasing role, the United States was going to play in the politics of South Vietnam.

From its very beginning the Diem Government faced opposition from various sections in the domestic sphere. As early as October 1954 it was opposed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and later by the various religious sects like Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. However for the United States Diem became the pivot and instrument of its policy, and it backed him in his struggle to retain power. A personal letter from President Eisenhower to President Diem on 23 October 1954 inaugurated a series of US moves to strengthen his hands. In this letter, the American President "offered to assist the Government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means". To start with, the American assistance was more a political and economic rather than a military commitment. It assumed France's financial and training responsibility for Saigon's army and embarked upon a massive programme of economic aid to Diem's Government. The economic aid between the years 1954 and 1965 totalled $2,397 million. Seventy per cent of this was spent on defence and police purposes, the remainder being allotted to economic and technical purposes, including aid for instigating the exodus of refugees to the South, their transportation and rural settlement.

The Eisenhower letter to Diem which talked in terms of helping the Diem Government to resist aggression and was based on the expectation that it would bring about the much needed reforms, was apparently simple and limited in its aim. Nevertheless, in subsequent years, this letter was magnified into a document of fundamental importance and was interpreted to mean an unconditional and unending commitment to protect and preserve the South Vietnamese government from any opposition—both from within and without. It also meant that the weaker the Vietnamese government was internally, the deeper became the military commitment of the United States.

This military commitment was in the initial years indirect and was confined till 1965 to merely supply of arms and ammunition, and training the Vietnamese army. However, the manifold increase in the arms supply as well as in the number of Americans present in Vietnam to train and observe, brought the American policy to the brink of direct participation. Nevertheless successive American Presidents like Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and even Lyndon B. Johnson as late as October 1964 pledged that the American ground

troops would never participate in a direct combat in Vietnam. Within four months after this, the American "boys" were directly participating in a prolonged land war in Vietnam. It is ironic to note that this enormous commitment leading to an escalation of war is merely based on a casual, personal letter of a past President. In the meanwhile the war in Vietnam has had the distinction of being the most important and consistent compaign issue of at least three Presidential elections, and of having even forced one of them to retire.

This enlargement of American aims and its ever-deepening commitment in Vietnam, have been justified by the successive administrations in Washington on the plea that the Geneva Conventions had been nullified by the Hanoi Government, and that the war was provoked by the latter. But as many sources including the recent *Pentagon Papers* point out this reason "is not wholly compelling." In fact the years 1954 to 1960 found North Vietnam relatively quieter and more absorbed in its internal development. The North Vietnamese had pinned their hopes on the Geneva Settlement and believed that a reunification might be brought about by the elections as promised by Geneva. Their activities were confined to merely supporting the political struggle of the cadres within South Vietnam. During this period serious threats to Diem regime came from domestic quarters more as a rebellion from the South Vietnamese against his oppressive authoritarianism and included military cadres, religious sects, tribesmen, peasants and intellectuals who resented the suppression of democracy and freedom. It was not before May 1959 that North Vietnam came to be interested in the growing insurgency in South. But even then, its support was channelised through the National Liberation Front which was formed in December 1960 by the various communist, non-communist and anti-Diem elements within South Vietnam. This United Front which was organised and controlled mainly by the Communists, came to be referred commonly as the "Viet Cong". It quadrupled its membership within a year to 300,000. It is now agreed by many authorities, that the initiative to form the "Front" as also to take on to armed struggle, came from the South Vietnamese themselves and that the North did not participate in it.

With the formation of the N.L.F. there was intensified insurgency, and South Vietnam returned to a war-like situation. By 1961 when Kennedy entered White House, the Diem regime was collapsing

more because of its domestic political weakness rather than foreign military factors. However the Kennedy Administration chose to rescue Diem by expanding the American military and political commitment. As *Pentagon Papers* point out this expansion was not merely piecemeal but even secretive, the Administration taking care to minimise public recognition of the growing American role. In the Spring of 1961, President Kennedy ordered 400 Special Forces troops and 100 other American military advisers to Vietnam—a step which constituted a flagrant violation of the Geneva Accords.* The President also ordered a calendestine campaign of "sabotage and light harassment" in North by U. S. trained South Vietnamese agents. In the face of Diem's exaggerated infiltration figures, Kennedy agreed to finance 30,000-man increase in South Vietnam's Army. Even though the National Intelligence reported that there was little evidence that the Viet Cong was relying on external supplies, the U. S. decided to increase its commitment unconditionally. In October 1961, the President agreed to the use of U. S. advisers in initiating ground actions, even though he still opposed sending a task force or a combat unit. In effect the U. S. chose to increase the number and not change the "quality" of American "advisers" in Vietnam. In the subsequent months this number increased at a much faster pace; by the time the Kennedy regime came to an end there were 16,732 U. S. military "advisers" in Vietnam. The U. S. Administration believed that an increasing role of these "advisers" would even help the Diem regime to overcome its own evident weaknesses. This belief was also broadened to mean that the U. S. could even intervene in the internal political manoeuvering of toppling one regime and replacing it with another, in order to make its military presence effective. The abandoning of Diem and replacing him with alternate leaders was not the type of political reform that South Vietnam needed. It would not have prevented another "Bay of Pigs" as the U. S. had fondly believed.

In November 1963 there was a change of persons at the helm of affairs in Saigon as well as in Washington. This gave an opportunity to reconsider the American Vietnam policy. But the two Administrations merely tread the familiar path — perhaps with a little more relish and vigour. The United States would establish a man of its choice in power in Saigon and credit him with immense

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* By this Accord, which the U. S. had pledged to observe, the U. S. had limited its military advisers to 685 in Vietnam.

powers to defeat the Communists. When he proved incapable of the immense task, it would try to strengthen him by increasing its military assistance, only to finally denounce him. This made the U.S. the power behind the throne in Saigon, thus giving Washington even more leverage to meddle in Vietnamese political affairs—and, for the same reason, more and more unpopular.

Thus by the Spring of 1964, the American intervention in Vietnam had assumed very many ramifications. But the Administration still chose to call it as a policy of "limited commitment" with "limited liability"—the distinction between "limited" and "unlimited" becoming progressively imperceptible. Even as the Administration was talking of "limited" commitment, its men in Vietnam had mounted clandestine bombings on North Vietnam. It was, however, not before August that these attacks were publicised and a justification given. The occasion was the "Tonkin Gulf Incidents".

On 2 and 4 August 1964, it was alleged, the North Vietnamese had fired on U.S. destroyers *Maddox* and *C. Turner Joy* stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin. The United States called it an "open aggression" from a foreign enemy and ordered retaliatory attacks on North Vietnamese bases and oil depots. Many sources including Senator Wayne Morse (Democrat-Oregon) at that time, and the Pentagon studies later, have proved that these incidents were not caused by any North Vietnamese action. They were mainly contrived by the U.S. to publicise the bombings that were already taking place, and to push through the Congress a resolution that the President had been carrying around in his pockets for months. The resolution was passed on 7 August and was interpreted by the Administration as a declaration of war, one which gave the President virtually "a blank check". The Tonkin Gulf Incidents thus were the groundwork and the threshold (as Mc George Bundy put it) for the wider war that followed within less than a year.

The studies made by Pentagon reveal that "an elaborate program of covert military operations against the State of North Vietnam" had begun as early as February 1, under the code name Operation Plan 34A and the "Covert War" was begun. Its objective, according to Pentagon, was to break the "Will of Hanoi" in continuing its support to the Viet Cong. Positively it sought to secure the American troop movement. Hence it was defined as "a defensive strategy of security". In May the target list in North Vietnam as well as the Congressional resolution had been drafted. It was around

the same time that the crisis in Laos had intensified. This made the United States accede to General Khanh's request for an attack on the North. On 19 July General Khanh broke his promise and publicly announced the plans for a "March North" campaign. This public announcement put the U.S. in a quandry as this compelled the Administration to make the bombings "open". The Gulf of Tonkin Incidents had to be invented.

These 'Incidents' were equally important because they marked a turning point in American policy. During the Eisenhower-Kennedy years the main enemies of the U.S. and South Vietnam regime were the South Vietnamese. But after February 1964, they had a foreign enemy. The bombing of the North brought about the direct confrontation between the United States and North Vietnam and for the first time took the war into the territory of the North. This was a "provocation strategy" as the Pentagon called it, to invite the North Vietnamese send in their army. A year later when the U.S. introduced 200,000 American ground troops into the war, this was justified on the ground that the North Vietnam Army was fighting along with the Viet Cong. Thus the bombing through 1964 meant a change in the character of the war.

However the election campaigns in the fall of 1964 in which Vietnam was a prominent issue, compelled Johnson to adopt a more modest course. It is ironical that in this elections Johnson was pitted as a moderate against Goldwater whose platform included the use of nuclear weapons, if necessary, to bring the war to a quick end. This made it necessary that the bombing be covert and cautious, and that its aims and magnitude be kept secret. The need for such a restraint seemed to be over once Johnson was re-elected. Many of the equivocal statements which were being made by prominent officials came to an end. In December the United States formulated a new strategy of air strikes against North to "persuade" Hanoi to seek a negotiated settlement — a carrot and stick approach. It was justified as a limited engagement, one which would "save" the U. S. from sending in its troops. In retrospect all these arguments and justifications look specious. There was not much of a time gap between the bombing strikes and the American troops moving in, for assessing the effect of the bombings. Nor could the Pleiku incident[1]

1. On 7 February 1965, the Viet Cong attacked the U. S. military advisers' compound at Pleiku in the Central Highlands and an Army helicopter base at Camp Holloway. Nine Americans were killed and 76 wounded.

in February 1965 justify such a 'direct' intervention. The sustained bombing of North Vietnam and the export of American marines were not the result of sudden impulse; they merely triggered what the *Pentagon Papers* call "the long contemplated Presidential decision to give an appropriate and fitting response" — a decision that was made as early as September 1964. As the patience within the nation was weaning thinner, the United States had decided to strike hard and if necessary even change the "limited risk gamble" of the previous Presidents under a plan known as "Flaming Wart."

This change was brought about in spite of the awareness that the bombings might not bring the North Vietnamese to their knees. In fact the Intelligence reports from Vietnam, as late as November 1964 stated that the primary source of the resistance in South Vietnam was indigenous and could be traced to the revolutionary social aims of the Communists and their identification with the nationalist cause against the French earlier. These sources were also convinced that bombing the North would have no lasting effect on the situation and would not "break the will of Hanoi". However neither the President nor his close advisers were prepared to accept these reports. Consequently when the Administration found that its long-planned bombing had only stiffened Hanoi's backbone, it decided on 1 April 1965 to adopt the "offensive-enclave strategy" and use American ground troops. It ordered an increase of 18—20,000 men in Vietnam. In June the Department of State announced that the U. S. troops were available for combat support and a month later the President approved deploying of 44 battalions or 193,887 men. With this decision enforced before the end of the year, the United States prepared itself to re-enact Korea in Vietnam, thereby giving up an axiom held for the past decade and a half, of not indulging in another land warfare in Asia against the Asians.

In the course of 1965 and 1966 there was a rapid expansion of American forces in Vietnam mainly because the United States consistently under-rated the ability of the Viet Cong to build-up their efforts. This ground expansion was accompanied by continuous escalation in the air strikes as well as far-reaching technological advances. The American commitment had now become literally open-ended. It was left to the "Tet offensive" in January 1968 to call a halt to this unquestioned and blind increase in the American troop build-up in Vietnam. By now the troops stood at a figure of 579,000 besides the reserve call-up of 98,451.

The American policy in Vietnam had an air of fatalism and helplessness which it demonstrated, by allowing itself to be dragged into a deeper and deeper involvement. The successive American Presidents in the past two decades have contented themselves with merely following and in fact enlarging on the past American commitments they had inherited. This, however, did not mean that the American Presidents had no options in their approach to what was becoming a veritable nightmare for them. The truth was at no time between 1950 to 1968 did the American Administration take time off from the war to reconsider and reshape its policy. Even after 1964 when the entire Administration and in particular the Pentagon, was rocked by internal dissension, this dissension was one of methods and degree of participation and not of basic premises. There was never a reopening of the basic question of the very involvement of the U.S. in the Vietnamese struggle. It is tragic to note that the Administration, especially during the Johnson years, was so obsessed with the military situation in Vietnam that the possibility of a political solution, particularly one arrived at by the Vietnamese themselves was completely out of their minds. Even if there was a casual mention of such a possibility it was resented in the official circles. The *Pentagon Papers* speak of a cablegram from President Johnson on 20 March 1964 in which he said that he was intent on "knocking down the idea of neutralization wherever it rears its ugly head..." It wanted to discourage any "neutralist sentiment" in Saigon that might lead to a neutralist coup and a coalition government. It was equally keen to prevent a "Vietnam Solution" — a direct negotiation among the Vietnamese themselves — as it feared, this would result in a communist victory.

It was only towards the end of 1967 that disenchantment began appearing in Pentagon, and it was not before March 1968 that it spread to the White House. But even disillusionment did not lead to a total disengagement which was the only possible and worthwhile solution. It only led to a limited bombing and a halt in further deploying of troops. Even George W. Ball, John A. Mc Cone and Robert Mc Namara while opposing the escalation did not really advocate a complete revision of American commitment. Each time U.S. got an opportunity to reconsider its policy, it followed the simple formula of "the same thing a little more" and preferred to muddle around with blinkers drawn. The American policy revolved around the illusion that it has one immediate objective or other in

Vietnam. Each time this objective was defeated, it continued its presence, by inventing another one.

Thus initially the Americans claimed, their interest in Vietnam was to "save" it from Communism and hence supported and urged the French Colonialists to wage a victorious war. When this failed, the United States jumped at the half-loaf presented by Geneva. From the rear seat which it was occupying till now, the U.S. moved forward and started giving open and direct support to South Vietnam, ostensibly to strengthen and stabilise the regime. Very soon, however, even this proved unattainable. The United States found itself supporting a regime that wanted to suppress all opponents—Communists and others alike. Hence the United States reversed its policy; instead of supporting the established regime, it sought to establish the regime it wanted to support. Hence came the need to chalk out a new objective for itself.

The United States now revived the "domino" theory—a concept that had been proved untenable in 1954. In November 1962 this was expanded to mean that a defeat in Vietnam would lead to the loss (to USA) of all Asia upto Singapore. But by 1964 this theory too was discounted especially by the CIA which believed that even if Laos and Vietnam came under Communism, it would not mean any impact on other nations in the region. The emphasis was now laid on American position and prestige in the Far East—almost a confession of its hidden motives. The U.S. feared a victory of Communism would "ecourage" wars of liberation in Asia, Africa and worse still in Latin America ! Hence the U.S. justified its intervention as merely "to prevent a collapse of the morale" in South Vietnam and to "prevent infiltration of men and material from North Vietnam". It professed that its aim was to force Hanoi to negotiation table and accept terms that were not compromise terms but more akin to "a cease and desist" order. The failure of this "victory strategy" forced a scaling down in American aims and brought home the need for a diplomatic approach. In September 1967 was formulated the "San Antonio formula" by which the U.S. initiated secret diplomatic probings into Hanoi's willingness for "prompt and productive negotiations". Following the announcement of a halt in American bombings in March 1968, the way was cleared for negotiations. In May 1968, started the Conference in Paris among the delegations of United States, North Vietnam, Provisional Republican Government of South Vietnam and South Vietnam.

The Paris Conference raised hopes that the war might at last come to an end and the American military presence withdrawn. The Conference has since then met frequently but peace for the Vietnamese is still a dream that has eluded realisation. Meanwhile the Vietnam issue had passed into the hands of President Nixon. President Nixon had earlier opposed Johnson's conduct of war —of Americanising it— but not his decision to send in combat troops. Soon after assuming office, Nixon decided against a total and immediate withdrawal of all American forces—a decision that merely followed the footsteps of his predecessors. He enunciated instead the "Nixon Doctrine" which aimed to make the Vietnamese fight the American war in Asia. This policy of Vietnamisation believed in rapidly building up the South Vietnamese army so that the United States would be able to withdraw its ground forces gradually. This plan which was launched in March 1969 was however, conditional : the continuance and rate of withdrawal would depend on the rate of growth in the Vietnamese strength as also on the absence of any fresh challenge from the Viet Cong. The Nixon Doctrine really meant only a change in the strategy and not in the aims of policy.

In actual terms the Vietnamisation meant a greater and greater mechanisation of the war thereby enabling a cut in the ground troops. It was a gradual replacement of the ground warfare by more of aerial warfare which would continue to be an American operation. This would eliminate the reliance on the "undependable" South Vietnamese army as also help in making the entire operation more clandestine and total. The war could now be waged with highly automated weapons that could cause massive destruction with precision and promptness. This has made the entire programme of "Vietnamisation" very sinister, awe-inspiring and terribly inhuman. It has highlighted the ambiguity and duplicity perpetrated by the Administration on its own population in the "democratic", "open society" of the United States. It has demonstrated the cynical persistence with which a Super Power could callously violate the numerous domestic and international laws. It is equally horrifying to note how the Powers in the world are willingly appeasing the United States in its flagrant denunciation of its own constitution and treaty obligations. The Vietnamisation plan is only one more—and perhaps the greatest—of the "confidence tricks" that the White House has been playing on the people of the United States and the world.

The War in Vietnam, in the final analysis, has emerged as the greatest and the most persistent confrontation ever witnessed in history between the military potentials of a super power and the human willpower of a small nation that never got a breathing spell to look into its essential domestic problems. In the absence of an immediate and total withdrawal by the United States, the only other possible end to this prolonged agony of Vietnam is complete annihilation. It is inconceivable that the Vietnamese will settle for anything less than the return of Vietnam to them.

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INDIA AND SIKKIM

P. Raghunadha Rao

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